**Difficult People and Situations—And How to Work With Them**

**Involuntary Attendee**: Is at the meeting under duress; did not choose to attend

* Question the person, i.e., their needs
* Acknowledge that attendance was not their idea
* Don’t reject/ignore
* Address him/her specifically

“You are here—what would be a good use of your time?”

**Dominator**—Asserts authority or superiority to manipulate the group or certain members; interrupts contributions of others; controls through use of flattery or patronization; consciously or unconsciously works at redirecting the team towards a particular agenda.

Most dominators mean well, are not trying to harm the group, and truly believe that everyone wants to hear their point of view

The main reasons for their behavior are high anxiety or a need to control or both. An anxious person will talk for a long period of time, shifting from subject to subject. Dominators tend to be self-centered and even narcissistic and may dominate to avoid talking about a difficult subject. May not be aware of what they are doing and how it impacts the group process. When stopped, may start again: “Yes, but…”

* It takes firm facilitation to stop them and keep them stopped.
* Acknowledge, seek opinions of others and then go back to the person if there is something you wanted to use.
* Establish a procedure whereby each person contributes one idea to the discussion and then must wait until every other group member does the same before contributing again
* Interrupt the dominator and ask him/her to summarize the point quickly so that others can add their ideas, too.

“Thank you for giving us all those ideas, Erin. Let’s hear from others in the group now.”

**Withdrawn**—Removes him/herself psychologically or physically from the group; quiet; answers questions only briefly.

* Do not let conflicts remain unresolved; talk with the person privately to find out what is happening
* Direct questions to and solicit ideas from him/her so this person stays involved.
* Offer opportunities/don’t pursue—allow the freedom to participate
* Perhaps talk at break—“How’s it going?”

“Carol, I noticed you haven’t been as involved in the group lately. Is everything O.K.?”

**Blocker**— Tends to have negative reactions and is stubbornly resistant; tries to maintain or resurrect an issue after the group has finished with it; may have an agenda and may speak for a specific group or view; disagrees and opposes ideas; resists the group’s wishes for personally oriented reasons

* Incorporate statements in the original norms that deal with cooperation and interruptions
* Encourage this person to explain reasons behind his/her objection
* Look for any aspect of the position that supports the group’s ideas so that this person moves from left to center field
* Refocus his/her participation as a recorder or process observer
* Ask the group to deal with this uncooperative behavior.

“It seems like we may be forgetting the norms we set as a group. Should we take a few minutes to revisit them now?”

**Aggressor**—May work in many ways: deflating others; expressing disapproval of the values, requests, or feelings of others; attacking the group or its problems; joking aggressively; taking credit for the group’s successes

* When your group first gets together, review your norms with them, highlighting the rule that all ideas will be accepted; the first time someone criticizes another person, reinforce this rule.
* Specific questions: “Why did you say that, John?”
* “What would you like me to do?” (Encourage a solution)
* “From 10 years of your experience, this works—but what does the group think or what have others experienced?”

“You have a point, but we need to solve our problem, not attack each other’s ideas.”

**Recognition Seeker**—Works in various ways to call attention to him or herself by boasting, acting in unusual ways, trying to prevent being placed in less important roles; talkative; makes a display of his or her lack of involvement; may take the form of cynicism, nonchalance, horseplay, and other forms of negative behavior.

* Use your body language
* When your group first gets together, review your norms with them

“Just a minute, I want to hear from…I’ll come back to you.”

**Destructive Dominators**—A small percentage of dominators whose intentional goal is to wreck or destroy the meeting.

* Normal facilitation techniques are ineffective.

**Situations**

**External issues**

* Listen/acknowledge and steer away from discussion at hand; perhaps set a time to come back and discuss

“Can we have an agreement that external issues stay out of the workshop?”

**Silent Group**

* Ask, “ Why?”
* Perhaps it’s old information and material; participants may not understand the work or the presentation method is poor. Participants may lack background knowledge.

**Side conversations**: Whispering, giggling, and having private conversations with another person.

* Set guidelines and expectations at the beginning of the meeting
* Stop the meeting and ask those involved in the side conversation to share what they are talking about with the group
* Ask whether “A” heard what “B” said…if no, get “B” to repeat.
* Stop the meeting and comment that it is difficult for you to hear the others or to concentrate on the topic at hand with side conversations occurring
* Privately talk with the distracters and discuss their expectations for the meeting’s topics
* Empower others to confront the distracters with how these side conversations keep everyone from concentrating on the group’s discussion.
* Go and stand behind or near them. Your presence will draw attention to them.

“I am having trouble focusing on the discussion with the side conversations going on. Is anyone else experiencing this?”

“It is difficult to focus on the discussion with side conversations going on. Can we agree that we will all focus on the main discussion?”

“I sense we are losing people’s attention and interest; can we do a check-in to see where people are on this topic?”