



DEALING WITH DIFFICULT MEMBERS

“Difficult people” are found in every organization. It’s important that the leader learn to deal effectively with these individuals and insure that their behaviors and attitudes do not adversely affect the group’s functioning.

The Seven C’s of Dealing with Difficult Behavior

Compliment

Difficult people need praise too.

Concern

Genuine caring for the welfare of another will help build a strong relationship.

Congratulations

Helping people who see themselves as losers to feel like winners can eliminate some problems.

Challenge

Boredom may cause people to react in difficult ways.

Confidence

Expressing confidence in someone is often all s/he needs to have confidence.

Compromise

Attempting to give in some way may soften a hard person.

Choice

Given a choice, a person may feel important and respond in a positive way.

BE PROACTIVE

Difficult members are much more of a problem when an organization is not a strong team. Be sure to include team building activities in your organizations’ retreats and workshops. Always remember **People Support What they Help to Create!** Involve members in all aspects of the organization and they will tend to be more supportive.

Sometimes nothing will work and you will not be able to help a member change his/her behavior or attitudes. It may be helpful to ask your adviser or someone who knows the member better than you for some assistance.

Here are six types of difficult behaviors that can be found in many group settings and some tips to deal with them:

Hostile Aggressives

People who try to bully and overwhelm by Bombarding others with cutting remarks.

TIPS

- Stand up for yourself
- Give them time to run down
- Look directly at them and wait
- Get into the conversation
- Get their attention
- Make sure they are seated, not standing over you
- Don't argue or try to cut them down

Complainers

People who gripe without ceasing, but never try To do anything about what they complain about.

TIPS

- Listen attentively to them
- Acknowledge by paraphrasing their concerns
- Don't agree with or apologize for their allegations
- State and acknowledge facts without comment
- Ask "how do you want this situation to be remedied?" and "What are you willing to do to remedy the situation?"

Negativists

People who never expect anything to work and Who never have anything positive or nice to say About anyone.

TIPS

- Be alert to avoid being pulled down into their despair
- Don't try to argue them out of their pessimism
- Try to find the problem at the source of its pessimism
- Play the "devil's advocate" by thinking of the negative alternatives and how to combat them

Silent Unresponsives

People who answer, when they answer at all, with grunts or yes/no.

TIPS

- Don't interrupt silence, give them some time to open up
- Ask open-ended questions
- If you get no comments, comment on what's happening
- Listen attentively if they open up, but do not gush
- If they do not open up, end the meeting and set up another.

Super Agreeables

Very personable, funny people who never act the way they say they will or how you thought they would.

TIPS

- Let them know you value them as a person
- Ask them to be honest with you
- Carefully point out inconsistencies in their behavior
- Listen to their humor, as there may be hidden messages in their comments

Know-It-All Experts

Condescending, pompous people who claim to know all about everyone and everything.

TIPS

- Know what you are talking about when you converse with them
- Listen attentively to them, then paraphrase main points they made

-Question firmly inaccurate facts or inconsistencies, but do not confront them in a group situation

Adapted from a handout by Roy E. Harper and Jennifer Ireland, Central Missouri State University and LeaderBits, The University of Kansas.