

Learning to Be a Good Facilitator

Dealing with Difficult Personalities

General Tactics for Dealing with Difficult People:

1. Ask about what the person is saying/doing in order to check your perception of his/her behavior (“You seem to be... Is that correct?”)
2. Acknowledge the person’s concern and/or legitimacy of viewpoint (even if you disagree).
3. Ask if the group is of the like mind to weigh solutions
4. First, collaborate or seek win/win. Last confront, or seek win/lose.
5. Set ground rules: time limit on topics, comments, brainstorming, interrupting, etc.
6. If you know a difficult person will be attending, set down some guidelines that once agreed to can be referred back to (ex. Sharing “air time,” making snap judgments, holding side conversations, etc.). Meet before hand if possible or in private during/afterwards.
7. Other people in the group want you to deal with them.
8. Enlist allies.

Dealing with the complainer -finds faults with many aspects of the training

1. If minor, acknowledge, apologize if appropriate and move on. (“We need to focus on the agenda.”)
2. Ask “what would you like to have different?” “What can/cannot accommodate you.”
3. If the complainer is critical of the content, ask if he/she can wait until further into the workshop to decide how useful the information is.
4. Last resort: “You are free to leave if you feel there’s no benefit of being here.”
5. Acknowledge people and ask key questions.
6. Humor.
7. Ask the group what they think about the complainer’s idea and then shut your mouth.

Dealing with the Uninvolved- not fully engaged in the training

1. If the Uninvolved continually wants to repeat materials, ask what she/he did hear and understand. Offer to meet privately later to discuss.
2. If the Uninvolved is withdrawn, ask if he/she is disinterested or displeased. If so, “I’m sorry I’m not giving you what you want.”
3. If the Uninvolved is super-agreeable, invite him/her to have a different opinion or be constructively critical. Encourage the Uninvolved to make a choice/select a point of view.
4. Ask them a choice question to draw them in.
5. Ask the person a question directly.

Dealing with the Passive/Aggressive- expresses negative feelings indirectly; denies feelings when confronted

1. Do not get defensive or into an argument.
2. Ask the P/A about his/her feelings, reminding that it’s okay to have negative feelings and say you’d like to hear what’s on his/her mind. (“Here’s what you just said. Can you elaborate on that?”)
3. If the P/A does so, thank her/him for sharing.
4. If the P/A doesn’t respond, say you must have misread the situation and say you’re glad everything is okay.
5. If the P/A is obviously but subtly antagonistic, point out the impact of his/her behavior. Ask how the two of you can find a compromise, or suggest one.
6. Ask person directly to explain.

7. Marginalize them.
8. Assure people it is ok to talk, that the situation is workable, offer an alternative.

Dealing with the Monopolizer (controls the discussion for long periods of time)

1. Interrupt politely:
 - a. “Forgive me for interrupting but because of time constraints, we need to skip past some of the details in order to focus on the points that relate to our topic.”
 - b. “We have a time limit for each person to express their views.”
 - c. “Can you summarize your points/the impact your story has?”
 - d. “You’ve been very generous in sharing your thoughts with us. I also want to make sure that everybody who’d like to speak gets an opportunity to do so.”
2. Enlist an ally.
3. Enlist a time keeper.
4. Walk up to the person.
5. Touch the person to get their attention.
6. Small compliment.

Dealing with the Know It All -speaks like an expert on everything, often negatively

1. Do not engage in a win/lose argument.
 - a. “Your point has merit, I’m not sure it’s the complete answer. There may be equally valid views.”
 - b. “I see you have strong opinions on this, so I hope you’ll be open to alternative points of view which we’re here to explore.”
2. Seek to engage others in the discussion. (“Each of us is entitled to make up our own minds about the value of this information. Let’s see what others have to say.”)
3. If the Know It All presumes to speak for the group, ask the group “Is this true for the rest of you?”
4. If the Know It All over intellectualizes, ask her/him to reduce the point to one or two sentences. Admit you’re having difficulty understanding that you find it too abstract. Possibly ask the group to decipher it.
5. Acknowledge (if true) the inappropriateness of the workshop. “Perhaps this workshop is not going to be very helpful to you.”
6. Jump in and acknowledge key points
7. Acknowledge point and ask others what they think.
8. Enlist main people as allies.
9. Be devil’s advocate.

The Distracter-interjects irrelevant comments/questions

1. Don’t allow yourself to go off on the tangent.
 - a. “Unfortunately, that’s beyond the realm of this discussion. We could talk at the break if you like.”
 - b. “I’m wondering by your statement if you feel the need to amend the agenda. We can/cannot revise it.”
2. If the Distracter interrupts others, suggest “We let each person speak for himself/herself.”
3. Use the parking lot.
4. Set up a time to talk later.
5. Fit his/her ideas into the agenda.

