

Dealing with Difficult Members

Difficult members can be found in every organization. It is important that the leaders learn to deal effectively with them to insure that their behaviors and attitudes do not adversely affect the group's ability to function.

The 7 C's of Effectively Working with Difficult Behavior

- Compliment – Difficult people need praise too
- Concern – Genuinely caring for their welfare will assist in building that relationship
- Congratulations – Assist members with a negative view of themselves so that they feel like winners
- Choice – Given a choice a member may feel important and respond positively
- Challenge – Boredom can cause members to react in a negative or difficult way
- Confidence – Expressing confidence in a member's ability assists in building their self-esteem
- Compromise – Attempting to compromise may encourage flexibility

Types of Negative Behavior

- Hostile Aggressive:** try to bully and overwhelm, usually by sarcasm and cutting remarks
Tips – Stand up for yourself, look directly at them and wait, do not argue or try to cut them down
- Complainers:** constantly complain, but never try to do anything about what they are complaining about
Tips – Listen attentively to them, acknowledge their concerns, ask “how do you want to remedy the situation?”
- Negativists:** never expect anything to work, or who never have anything good to say about anything or anyone
Tips – Do not be pulled down by their negativity, do not argue with them
- Silent Unresponsive:** only participate with short responses and never contribute
Tips – Do not interrupt silences, give them a chance to open up, ask open-ended questions
- Super Agreeable:** are very personable, funny, and never act or follow through the way you thought they would
Tips – Ask them to be honest, carefully point out inconsistencies, let them know you value them as a person
- Know It All Experts:** are condescending, pompous, and claim to know everything
Tips – Know what you are talking about, listen attentively and affirm their perspective

Handling Negative Reactions

- When you see someone go into attack mode or get defensive, recognize that it's useless to argue with them
- Realize that the person is feeling very insecure at that time
- Don't continue to push them because they will only get worse
- If the symptoms only seem to occur when the person is under stress, wait until another time to pursue the discussion
- If they are always defensive or attacking others, you may need to find another person to work with

Adapted from resources from the University of Wyoming, and Center for Leadership and Community Engagement, University of Arkansas