

Coping with Challenging Group Participants

Challenging Characteristic	What to do...
Overly Talkative An “eager beaver” or a showoff is always the first to respond to a question and has lots to say. If allowed, will monopolize the conversation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the person’s comments and interject with, “That’s an interesting point...now let’s hear what other people have to say.” • I’d like to hear more about that the break, who else would like to share.
Argumentative Combative person always disagrees with something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep calm and turn it over to the group “Would anyone like to comment about what was just said?” • After enough debate, state the importance of moving on and if necessary, agree to disagree. • As a last resort, talk to the person privately during the break. Try to find out if there is an immediate problem that can be worked out. Negotiate a standard of group conduct.
Rambler Lacks focus on the subject. Basically not on the same page and likes to talk regardless of the lack of relevancy to the current topic of discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an opportunity arises, politely interject with “I’m sure that is interesting, how does it connect with (agenda topic)?” • Attempt to make some connection of what was said with the group’s discussion and ask if there is anyone else who would like to comment. • Re-emphasize issue or topic at hand.
Distracter Distracts by having a side conversation while someone else is talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop the group discussion and simply remark that it is difficult to hear when more than one person is talking. • Ask the distracter if she/he would like to comment on the last comment made by someone else.

Challenging Characteristic	What to do...
Misstatement Stater Makes an obvious incorrect statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn it over to the group, “Would anyone like to comment about what was just said?” • If no one chooses to respond, then state that while some people have said or believed <i>so and so</i>, (correct statement).
Inquisitor May put you on the spot by asking your opinion. May want you to take sides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, turn it over to the group. “I’m more interested in what other might have to say, who has a comment?” • If appropriate, give your opinion in a diplomatic way without taking sides.
Griper Likes to stand on soap box and gripe about one’s own pet peeve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that the person has an issue. Point out that solving the issue is well beyond the scope of this group session. • Offer to talk during a break.
Quiet Is silent because of boredom, indifference, timid, etc?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address this person by name and ask intermittently if there is anything he/she would like to add or comment on. • Structure the discussion in round-robin fashion. Ask the question and state, “I’d like to hear from everyone, so let’s start with Mark on my left and to around.”
Groupie Agrees with everything that is said and doesn’t voice her/his own opinions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate discussion that encourages divergent point viewpoints.
Other:	

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Reference: Julius Eittington, *The Winning Trainer*, Gulf Publishing Company, Houston Texas, 1989.