

Problem Situations for Leaders of Meetings

The following are some examples of problem situations and possible solutions for the leader to institute (ASME, 2004):

Problem	Possible Solution
Member comes late to meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reserve a front seat for latecomers;• Talk to the person in private;• Remind members of start time ahead of time, on the agenda;• Start meeting time at unusual times, say 12:57 pm instead of 1:00 pm
Private discussion between 2 or more members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't embarrass the "talkers." Call on one by name, but ask an easy question that will draw him or her back to the group;• Alternatively, call on one by name, restate the last comment made by a group member, and ask the person's opinion of it.• If you move around the room, casually walk over to "talkers" without saying anything to them directly;• Temporarily sit on a table or chair near the "talkers".
Group not participating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use better eye contact; look directly at others when asking a question;• Allow for silence; some members take longer to respond;• Ask "What have I failed to make clear?";• Propose an unacceptable solution—this usually gets others' interest and involves members;• Rephrase question in a simpler manner;• Raise a debatable question;• Tell an anecdote about the situation;• Misspell or misread a word.• Ask the group directly about their participation and what might be getting in the way.
Group disagrees with ideas being proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Question each member on disagreement;• Present facts to substantiate your position;• Admit that there may be some exceptions, if indeed there are exceptions;• Agree with the group; indicate that further investigation is warranted; can be completed in time for next meeting;• Direct comments to the members who have not expressed a position yet.

<p>Highly argumentative individual member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your own anger in check; • Recognize the strengths of the individual member whenever possible; • Try to keep from allowing this individual to incite the rest of the group; • As a last resort, talk to the individual at a break and try to identify source of the difficulty and try to come to some resolution.
<p>Members falling asleep</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactfully call on sleeping person; • Change pace of your speaking, increase volume; provide more animation when speak; • Open windows; • Acknowledge that the subject may be dull; • Take a break; • Give the group a “stretch”; • Change method of presentation; • Use a group exercise.
<p>Participants ask leader point-blank questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind members that the answer is among them somewhere; request their assistance: “Let’s explore that...”; • Give a point-blank answer; • Admit you don’t know the answer; • Assign question to one or more members to investigate and report back at next meeting; • Remind group that all circumstances around the issue are not yet know.
<p>One or more members reluctant to talk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go around the room, getting each person’s point of view; • Ask questions looking directly at reluctant person; • Walk directly to reluctant person and ask question face-to-face; • Appeal to person’s strengths; for example, “Donna, you’ve had a lot of experience with this kind of situation, what do you think?”.
<p>Individual repeatedly expounds on personal issue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask group how one of them would handle the situation or issue; • Indicate that time does not allow for discussion of one individual case; • Be tactful, but interrupt and ask others to comment; • Offer to discuss the issue with the individual after the meeting; • Ask what bearing the individual issue has on the subject being discussed.

Meetings: How to Run Them Effectively

<p>Member wants to discuss irrelevant issues or ramble on</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the person to summarize; • Thank the person but let him or her know that others are also encourage to participate; • Raise question as to whether the group is on target and let them decide; • Make occasional summary statements; • Restate objectives of the meeting; • Make a humorous remark, “I’m lost here—how are these comments applicable to the discussion?”; • This is another example of someone who is trying to participate and contribute, but actually makes your job more difficult by keeping others out of the discussion.
<p>Participants feel the issue or subject doesn’t apply to their work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the group advantages of discussing the issue (time saving, better group relationships, etc.); • Point out value of storing information for future use; • Attempt to frame issue in broader context of job or life outside of work.
<p>Respected group member takes issue with sound ideas being presented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep restating the principle, each time a little slower and a little firmer; • Permit such members to talk themselves out; • Check with others to see if there is broader agreement; • Be alert for weak points in their argument in order to identify related issues for this member; • Cite application of the principle to something the member can agree with.
<p>Group does not understand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rephrase questions and comments several different times in several different ways; • Use examples, analogies and comparisons; • Permit members to question you for clarification; • Break down a question or comment to several smaller pieces of information; • Use visual aids.
<p>Member talks too much</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to embarrass or be sarcastic to the individual; • Try stating “That’s an interesting point”, and then quickly asking “Let’s see what the group thinks?”; • In general, let the group take care of the individual; • Refrain from calling on the member; • Do not look at the member when asking a question; • Wait for a pause and then quickly say “Thank you” and go on to ask another member for their input; • Let the person talk without giving them any encouragement to continue.

Meetings: How to Run Them Effectively

<p>Members talking about a different subject</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If members' comments are way off base, take the blame yourself such as "Something I said must have led you off track. This is what we should be discussing"; then restate the point.
<p>Inarticulate members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even when they understand, some people have difficulty putting their thoughts into words. You might say "So, you're point is that..."; try not to modify the members ideas.
<p>Some members are "grippers"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if the "griper" has a legitimate complaint, point out that this meeting is not the place to address it. Talk privately with the individual after the meeting, alternatively, you can get the group involved. If the person is griping, ask someone else to answer.
<p>Personality clashes between members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize points of agreement; • Minimize points of disagreement; • Draw the group's attention to the objective of the meeting and ask direct questions on the disputed topic, drawing other group members into the discussion; • Ask the people involved to leave their personal disputes out of the discussion.