Dealing with Difficult Members

The Six Cs

COMPLIMENT
Difficult members need affirmation as much as any other member, maybe more.

CONCERN
Genuine caring for the welfare of another will help you begin to build trust.

COMPROMISE
Attempting to meet in the middle and make concessions may help you come to a solution faster.

CHOICE
Give your difficult member a choice or multiple choices. This will help them feel empowered and less victimized.

CHALLENGE
Boredom is sometimes the culprit for odd behavior, and providing them with a challenging task may encourage different behavior.

CONFIDENCE
Expressing confidence in someone’s abilities can lead to confidence building.

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

Six Types of Difficult Members

HOSTILE AGGRESSORS
Members who try hard to bully and overwhelm the group by bombarding others with cutting remarks.

TIPS
❖ Stand firm and confident when speaking with them
❖ Give them time to run out of their aggressive energy
❖ Step in when a conversation between members turns sour
❖ Remain calm, don’t argue or try to cut them down
❖ In a private conversation, ask if there’s a reason for their hostility
❖ If there is a reason, ask what can be done to help resolve the issue
❖ Ask them to consider how their actions affect the entire group

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**STRONG AND SILENT**
Members who rarely respond. When they do respond it is often with yes or no answers or simple responses.

**TIPS**
- Don’t interrupt their silence, give them some time to think and respond; some people need time to process internally
- Ask open-ended questions
- If you still get limited responses, address the elephant in the room and ask why such limited response.
- Listen attentively if and when they do provide more extensive answers or comments

**KNOW-IT-ALLS**
Condescending, pompous members who claim to know it all about everyone and everything.

**TIPS**
- Listen attentively to them, then paraphrase the main points they made
- In a private conversation, question firmly about inaccurate facts or inconsistencies
- Ask them how they think their behavior or attitude might affect group meetings or tasks
- Show appreciation for their willingness to speak up, but ask them to consider their tone

**COMPLainers**
Members who gripe without ceasing (and who never have solutions to the issue 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 inserting your own opinion
- Ask them if they have suggestions as to how the situation might be remedied or what they might personally do to remedy the situation.

**CLASS CLOWNS**
Very personable, funny members. However, they never act the way they say they will or follow through.

**TIPS**
- Let them know you value them as a person and the light-heartedness they bring to the group
- 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
- Ask them how they think their positive energy can be used for the greater good

**NEGATIVE NANCYS**
Members who always expect the worst and who never look on the bright side.

**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 their pessimism
- Play the “devil’s advocate” by providing solutions to combat the worst-case scenarios