

Handout # 4: Handling Difficult Participant Behaviors

Behaviors	Recommended Strategies
The Know-it-all: wants to impose his or her opinion on everyone else. Also known as the Show off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank them for their contribution, but suggest others in the group may have viewpoints to add to the discussion. • Ask them a really difficult question, or say, "That's interesting. Let's see what the rest of the group thinks about that." Don't try to embarrass them or shut them out – it encourages them. • Encourage other group members to comment on the person's remarks freely. • Let the rest of the group take care of the person. • Build up the group confidence level so this type of member will not disrupt group dynamics
The Arguer: will argue about every point made, may try to trip up the facilitator, and will quibble over the most trivial detail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your cool, do not lose your head or allow others to do so. • Use questions. Draw out the individual and turn him or her over to the group. • Keep group members from getting personal. • Get the opinion of the majority • Agree or affirm any good points. Throw any bad points out to the rest of the group for discussion. • In private, try to find out what the problem is and gain their co-operation.
The "Resenter": knows the job better than anyone and resents having to go through "training".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the person to feel that his or her experience can be valuable to others. • Purpose of discussion is to share ideas and pool experiences.
The Talker: wants to do all the talking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you come to a pause in his or her monologue, thank him for his contribution and restate the relevant points before returning to the training. • Be very tactful but interrupt and ask others to comment. • Ask the individual to refrain from talking to allow others a chance to speak (perhaps a private talk would be advisable) • Use direct questions to other individuals as opposed to open questions to the group. • Keep the participant focused on the time restriction. Advise that we need to move on, thank them for their participation and refer back to agenda. Move on.

Behaviors	Recommended Strategies
The “Digressor”: this participant will often want to sidetrack the discussion into his own personal agenda. Similar to “The Talker”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use same techniques as with “The Talker”. • Take the blame yourself by saying something like, "Something I said must have led you off the subject – this is what we were discussing ...". Or simply tell him that that is a subject for another time.
The Introvert: They could be shy, bored, indifferent, insecure, or might just have a different style of learning. How you treat them depends on the reason for the silence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they are shy, compliment them when they do contribute. • If they are bored or indifferent, try asking them a question that you think may be interesting enough to them to provoke an answer. • Call on the person by name to give an opinion, but be sure to ask a relevant question you know the individual can answer, then offer praise. • Find something for the person to help with in a discussion (i.e. hang charts, assist in a demonstration, or make a report)
The disinterested: tries to stay uninvolved in the learning process. Similar to the Introvert.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use similar strategies as used with “The Introvert”. • Ask direct questions affecting the person’s work. • Ask his or her advice pertaining to the features of a meeting or learning session. • Tactfully quote some statement this person has made to you outside the discussion that is relevant to the moment. • Pick out something in the individual’s department and hold it up as a good example. • Carefully bring up subjects in which you know the person is interested.
The Stubborn One: This is the delegate who refuses point blank to accept the points being discussed, often disagreeing with the person making them in a personal way. This person often has no time for training, and doesn’t believe in these new-fangled ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the group again as you did with the Arguer. Throw his points out to the group and let them straighten him or her out. Tell him that you'll be happy to discuss it with him later, but time is short. • Study the person to determine the individual’s likes and special interests. Use analogies to link his/her interests to points being trained.
The Deflector: attempts to get your opinion instead of giving his or hers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer the question back to the group and then back to him or her. • Explain that any problem discussed must be for the greatest good to the greatest number and no personal gripes will be discussed. • Avoid discussions between two individuals with a personal grievance against each other and explain the classroom is not the place for the dispute. (See Mutual Enemies)

Behaviors	Recommended Strategies
The Intimidator: is usually wrong, but others in the group refuse to correct this person. Tries to intimidate others in the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always avoid direct criticism, sarcasm, and ridicule. • Use questions to have trainees expand on their answer. During the explanation, they might determine their error. • Analyze a similar case without reference to the individual. • Continue to ask the rest of the group for input to trainee's answer.
The Mutual Enemies: It is not common, but it does happen that you occasionally get a clash of personalities amongst the delegates. They may have some previous disagreements or history with each other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't interfere. Instead emphasize the points of agreement, minimizing the differences. • If it is really bad, ask that personalities be left out of the discussion and draw attention back to the relevant points in the training.
The Professional Gripe: The political point maker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politely point out that you are not able to change policy during the training session. • Refer them to individuals or departments within the organization that may be able to assist them with resolving their issue.
The Whisperers: The people that whisper throughout the session to their neighbor or colleague.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't embarrass them. Direct a point to them by name, or ask for comments on a previous point.