

**Title:**

Monsters in Meetings - Part 5, Dominant Participants

**Word Count:**

545

**Summary:**

The strongest contributors in your meetings can also prevent others from participating. Here's how to moderate their contributions. (This is the fifth of a seven part article on Managing Monsters in Meetings.)

**Keywords:**

effective meetings, bad meetings, business meeting, monsters in meetings, problem participants, facilitation, steve kaye, facilitator, leadership, one great meeting

**Article Body:**

Most meetings are attended by a giant.

These are the people who dominate a meeting with big ideas and big voices and big talk.

While dominant participants contribute significantly to the success of a meeting, they can also overwhelm, intimidate, and exclude others. Thus, you want to control their energy without losing their support.

Here's what to do.

**Approach 1: Ask others to contribute**

Asking quiet participants to contribute indirectly moderates the more dominant participants. Say:

"Before we continue, I want to hear from the rest of the group."

"This is great. And I wonder what else we could do." (Look at the quiet participants when you say this.)

**Approach 2: Change the process**

A balanced dialogue equalizes participation and sequential participation (a

round robin) prevents anyone from dominating the discussion.

#### Approach 3: Include them in the process

Ask dominant participants for their support during the meeting. Meet with the person privately and say:

"I need your help with something. It's clear to me that you know a great deal about this issue and have many good ideas. I also want to hear what other people in the meeting have to say. So, I wonder if you could help me encourage others to contribute."

You can also retain control by giving away minor tasks. For example, dominant participants make excellent helpers. They can distribute materials, run errands, serve as scribes, deliver messages, post chart papers, run demonstration units, operate projectors, change overhead transparencies, act as greeters, and (in general) perform any logistical task related to the meeting.

#### Approach 4: Create barriers

Simply move away from the more aggressive participants and make less eye contact. If you are unable to see them, you are unable to recognize them as the next speaker.

Use this approach with moderation and support it with complimentary requests for assistance. Ignoring someone conveys disapproval, which could change a potential ally into an adversary.

#### Approach 5: One point at a time

Sometimes dominant participants will control a discussion by listing many points in a single statement. They cite every challenge, condition, and consideration known, which completely clogs everyone else's thinking. End this by asking participants to state only one point at a time, after which someone else speaks. It is very difficult to monopolize a discussion when this technique is used.

Quiet participants often hope to be ignored; dominant participants want to be noticed. A quiet person may feel overbearing after making two statements in an hour. A dominant participant may feel left out after contributing only 95% of the ideas. You will be most successful moderating dominant participants by building bridges between what they want and what you need.

#### Approach 6: Interrupt with "excuse me"

Use the words "excuse me" as a wedge to interrupt a long monologue. It's important that you say "Excuse me" with polite sincerity. For example, you could say:

"Excuse me, this seems interesting and I wonder if you could tell me how it relates to our meeting."

"Excuse me, I'm sure this is very important and since we have only five minutes left for this issue, I wonder if you could summarize your main point."

Use these techniques to hold effective meetings by moderating contributions from the more outspoken participants.

This is the fifth of a seven part article on Monsters in Meetings.