

# Managing Group Dynamics

## 1. The Onlooker

This describes the non-contributor, or the person who has minimal participation in the group. In a quiet group they can cause problems, especially if there are too many Onlookers. Alternately, the Onlooker may be the product of other forces at work in the group, such as anger and aggression. In this case, it is the aggressive members who need attention more than the silent ones.

### Strategies for the Onlooker

- Direct clear, simple questions to them if they are secure enough to answer in the group.
- Respond eagerly to anything they say or do, acknowledging their response with praise.
- Be alert as to when they are trying to enter the discussion.
- Get all the group members to write some answers to a question and have them each read those answers aloud, thus involving the Onlooker.
- Use small subgroups to reduce the nervousness of addressing a big group.

## 2. The Monopoliser

We have all met these people. They can act as if no-one else exists in their world, and they just love the sound of their own voice. Their dominance is often a mask for their own insecurity. Some are simply born ramblers.

### Strategies for the Monopoliser

- Reiterate agreed ground rules, such as helping other to join the discussion.
- Interrupt the Monopoliser in the middle of a long speech. For example, “We have heard your ideas on this topic, Joe, let’s move on to discuss...”
- When they pause for breath, thank them by acknowledging their point and move on.
- Give specific instructions in your questions for those who have not spoken to answer the question being asked.
- Talk to them privately about the problem and suggest they serve others by drawing them into the discussion.

## 3. The Sidetracker

The Sidetracker arrives every week with a bag full of red herrings. They just cannot stay focused on the topic or task. Unfortunately, sometimes the red herring is more interesting than the set discussion and this poses a problem for the group and for you.

### Strategies for the Sidetracker

- The leader doesn’t have to respond to all input. Simply let the comments pass.
- Ask new questions to divert the discussion back to the topic.
- Acknowledge the sidetrack and suggest it be picked back up later.
- Pursue when they are important topics or will lead toward the discussion objective.

## 4. The Clown

The group Clown can be an asset. He or she relieves tension and sets a happy tone to the group. The Clown becomes a problem if they are attracting attention to themselves and distracting the group, or if the humor is inappropriate.

### Strategies for the Clown

- Don't always laugh, it only encourages them.

## 5. The Expert

Some group members appear to be very knowledgeable on certain subjects (*in some cases, all topics*). Is this merely their perception or is it true?

### Strategies for the Expert

- Give them a suitable task, such as a five-minute talk, allowing the group to benefit from, and test, the Expert's knowledge.
- Make them an ally in running the group; ask them to give feedback to the leaders.
- Talk to them privately.
- This person can be a monopoliser.

## 6. The Fighter

The fighter is argumentative and may be aggressive. They do have the positive effect of stirring up debate. They are dissatisfied with clichés and the party line. Their biggest hindrance is that they can intimidate others.

### Strategies for the Fighter

- Win some arguments to demonstrate their fallibility.
- Avoid being drawn into heated debate and losing the objective of the topic.
- Privately, point out the negative effect they have on the group.
- This person can be a monopoliser.
- Meet with you (*the leader*) afterwards to discuss.

## 7. The Chatterer

Chatterers conduct little conversations with their neighbor, distracting everyone. Sometimes they are chatting about the discussion topic, sometimes about unrelated matters. Whatever the subject, their mouths are open more than they are closed.

### Strategies for the Chatterer

- Pause and let everyone listen. This is a gentle way of drawing attention to the fact that they are being disruptive.
- Draw them into the discussion by asking their opinion: "We would all be interested in your comments, Bob." Try not to be sarcastic about this; be genuine.