

ART120

leadership series

Managing Difficult People in Exercise Classes Part 2: six types

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EFFECTIVE LEADERS RECOGNIZE AND MANAGE DIFFICULT PEOPLE RATHER THAN IGNORING THEM. In addition to the Hostile Aggressive covered in ART119, Dr Robert M. Bramson defines six other types: the Complainer, the Silent Unresponsive, the Secret Agreeable, the Negativist, the Expert Know It All, and the Indecisive. Difficult people you encounter might be a combination of one or more types.

THE COMPLAINERS continuously whine but never attempts to make anything better. They feel that they have little control over their lives and want to remain blameless, innocent, and morally perfect. So, they leave it up to you to solve their problem. A client might constantly gripe about the staff at the front desk of the club. He or she might grumble that the front desk help is inefficient, too young, always socializing, or other similar complaints. When you talk with Complainers, they simply continue to blame, accuse, and make a fuss. It is important for you to listen actively and acknowledge what Complainers are saying by paraphrasing back what they say. Don't apologize. Don't agree. Try to get them in a problem-solving mode by asking specific problem-solving questions. You might say, *"You mean they're inefficient?, How has this affected you? What ideas do you have to make it better?"* You might also say, *"I understand how you feel. What would you like to see accomplished?"* At this point, the Complainer might say, *"I don't know, I just don't like waiting while they fool around"*. You might answer, *"Has anyone put these thoughts in writing and sent a letter to the club manager?"* Be supportive and encourage the Complainer to take action. However, be prepared for them to stare at you, walk away, and complain to someone else.

THE SILENT UNRESPONSIVE personalities clam up, do not answer questions, and appear confused. They don't know how to answer, aren't aware, or can be withholding communication to sabotage your efforts. This allows them to achieve power over you. This type can be especially difficult for the personal trainer who relies on client feedback to determine program changes. Get them to talk by starting a light chitchat and finishing with an open-ended question, *"Joe, this was a new set of exercises. They are great for building the upper body, especially the chest muscles. What do you think about them?"* Now, do the FRIENDLY SILENT STARE.... Keep quiet, raise your eyebrows, and intently listen as if you are expecting an answer. Wait and if you do not get an answer, ask directly for participation by making a question, not an accusation. But don't be too nice. *"Joe, this is too important. We need to discuss your fitness program. Well, (pause, deep breath sigh) let's set another session"*. The Silent-Unresponsive type will then usually open up.

THE SUPER AGREEABLE consents to do everything but never does anything. This creates a challenge for the personal trainer, who needs commitment and follow-through. You get excuses and promises, and then they become super nice to avoid anger and rejection. You might have a client who agreed to add two days of walking to his fitness program but didn't. When you ask what happened, he says, *"Oh, I got so busy, but I promise to do it this week. You know how it is with work and family! By the way, how is your wife and kids? Your son is sure turning into a handsome young man! You're such a great parent!"* They try to distract by being nice. Because of their strong need to be liked, they can be honest only when they feel personally accepted. It is important for you to side step the fancy footwork and go right to the issue. You might say, *"I know how busy you are. What can I do to help? Let's sit down and come up with a plan. How about just one extra day of walking"*. The Super-Agreeable likes a compromise and a "win-win" solution.

THE NEGATIVIST is a pessimist and tries to tear down morale and will to win. They feel that they have little control over their lives and can't trust those who do. It's easier for them to remain in a miserable mood. They expect the worst and want everyone around them to be depressed too. When The Negativist says, *"What's the use of this exercise? It will never work,"* come up with a positive realistic statement. Say, *"I used to think that too, but several of my clients have found them to be quite effective"*. Never argue. Acknowledge what they say. Keep yourself positive, in a problem-solving mode, looking forward, and not dragged down. As a last result build a HORROR FLOOR. Ask them, *"What's the WORST that could happen?"* When those thoughts are out in the open, they can be discussed. Show your attention and thoroughly discuss each issue.

EXPERT-KNOW-IT-ALL personalities overwhelm you with facts and figures. They have the "right answer" for everything. They are knowledgeable and take any difference of opinion as a personal insult. It makes them feel powerful. Get them to consider alternative views without challenging their expertise. Some are phony experts that speak with authority on issues they know just a little about. Get them to think and listen by using a descriptive sentence of how you know it to be. Allow a means for them to save face. They are smart, so always paraphrase back the main points of what they said. You might have a KNOW-IT-ALL class member say, *"I started doing this abdominal exercises at home. Twenty-five repetitions work best for getting the entire abdominal area."* You might then say, *"I saw that Tony Little program too yesterday, but he did say to avoid back injury, start with one repetition and add one each day until you reach twenty-five."* They might then say, *"Oh yah, that's what I'm doing, working up to twenty-five starting today."*

THE INDECESIVES are pleasant but simply can't make up their minds. They listen well but take no action. They are torn by conflict, overly concerned about other people's feelings and thus can't think well. They feel that problems will just go away if they wait long enough. If you have a class in which members take turns contributing, the Indecisive will not want to hurt anyone's feelings in class by making a decision.

Suppose it is the Indecisive's turn to select a piece of music. He or she may like Oldies but know that several members hate oldies. Give them personal support. Don't exert excessive pressure. Smile and say, *"Well it's Joy's turn to select our song today. Let's all have a lot of fun with Joy's choice today"*. When Joy makes her choice, add further support. *"Great choice, I have fun moves for that song. Let's all jump in."*

It takes practice managing difficult people. You will learn what works best for you from each encounter. Mastery will come, making you an outstanding fitness leader.

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ART119 QUIZ

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- 1 - Dr. Robert M. Bramson defines twenty types of difficult people.
- 2 - The Complainer continuously whines but never does anything.
- 3 - The Silent type withholds communication to gain power over you.
- 4 - The Silent type usually responds to the friendly, silent stare.
- 5 - The Silent Type does not act as promised but is very nice.
- 6 - The Super Agreeable has a strong need to be liked.
- 7 - The Expert Know-It-All feels that they have little control over their lives.
- 8 - The Expert Know-It-All needs a means to save face if wrong.
- 9 - The Indecisive simply can't make up their minds.

10 - The Expert Know-It-All listens well but takes no action.