Tips on handling difficult members

Interventions

Interventions are techniques to use when you are confronted with disruption or problems during the meetings. They can be used separately, but are usually more effective when used in combination. Interventions attempt to be low on the confrontation scale but still are effective in getting disrupters under control.

* *Have the group decide:*
  + If someone refuses to stick to the agenda, keeps bringing up the same point again and again, challenges how you are handling the meeting, etc.
* *Use the agenda and ground rules:*
  + If someone keeps going off the agenda, has side conversations through the whole meeting, verbally attacks others, etc.
* *Be honest: Say what's going on:*
  + If someone is trying to intimidate you, you feel upset and undermined, you need to enlist the help of the group, etc.
* *Use humor:*
  + If there is a lot of tension in the room, people are resistant to being at the meeting, scared/shy about participating, you are seen as an outsider, etc.
* *Accept, deal, or defer:*
  + If someone keeps expressing doubts about accomplishing anything, is bitter and puts down every suggestion, keeps bringing up the same point over and over, has power issues, etc. This means: ACCEPT that what they are saying is true, don't ignore it; DEAL with it right there by spending some time on it, or DEFER it to the group for a decision about what to do. Also see points G and H below.
* *Use body language (if possible):*
  + To quiet side conversations, help quiet people participate, re-focus attention, etc. You can speak volumes by making eye contact, by smiling (or not smiling), or by a change in your seating position.
* *Take a break: Confront disrupters outside the meeting room:*
  + When less confrontational tactics haven't worked, someone keeps verbally attacking other participants, shuffling papers, having side conversations or cutting people off. You can deal with this issue outside the room, at a naturally-occurring break in the action.
* *Confront in the room:*
  + If it's appropriate and will not create backlash, if the group will support you, if you've tried less confrontational tactics already, etc.

Preventions

Preventions are techniques that can help you avoid disruption from the start. If you use these "preventions" from the start of your meetings, you should keep disruption away.

* *Listen to understand*
  + Don't just pretend to listen to what someone is saying. People can tell when you are not paying attention. Listen closely to understand the points the speaker is making, and restate these points aloud if you are unsure.
* *Stay in your role*
  + You cannot be a participant and the chair of the meeting at the same time. When you blur the lines, you risk alienating participants, causing resentment, and losing control of the meeting. Offer strategies, resources, and ideas--but not direct opinions.
  + Remember: "Chairperson" doesn't mean "participant." If you are passionate about an issue on the agenda and want to speak, make an arrangement BEFORE the meeting for someone else to chair that section.
* *Don't be defensive*
  + If attacked, criticized, etc., take a "step backwards." Think about what was said before you respond. Once you become defensive, you risk losing the group's respect and trust, and may well make the situation worse.

In Summary

Now you have the keys to planning and getting through effective meetings in your organization. A good meeting that is well prepared, focused and conducted efficiently can make yours a quality organization, while one that is poorly planned or run will cause a lot of difficulties for your group.

Contributor

Gillian Kaye

**COMMUNITY TOOL BOX**

Monica M Gornicke

La Crosse Diocesan Council of Catholic Women Parliamentarian

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