

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Dealing with Difficult Situations During Meetings

During the course of a meeting, a variety of difficult situations inevitably arise. Some of the more common types of problems that the Chairperson may have to handle are listed below along with some suggestions on how they might be addressed. Before considering the suggestions, it is important to underline the importance of developing an appropriate set of group behavior guidelines early in the life of a group as establishing clear expectations regarding individual behavior have proven to be very effective in reducing the number of difficult situations that might arise.

Getting off topic:

“Thanks, Frank, for those ideas; however, we agreed to focus on budget questions during this discussion.”

Going on at length:

“We have all heard your point, Celine, but hearing where others are coming from may help at this point. Can we let Jane share her ideas now?”

Interrupting other people:

“Please hold your idea until Bill has made his point. We agreed to listen when others are speaking. Bill please go ahead.”

Continually chatting with a colleague:

First few times: “Side conversations can be interesting, but they make it really difficult for others to follow the discussion.”

Persistent offences: “Could you share your ideas on Mary’s last point, Tom?”

Contributing vague suggestions:

“We get your general idea, but could you be more specific? Exactly how do you see the plan working? For example, when and who would start it?”

Being put on the spot:

If done aggressively, ask: “How would you handle the situation?”

Dominating the discussion: “Just a reminder, we agreed to try and ensure that everyone has a chance to make a contribution. So once you have made your point, please give others a chance to speak.”

Continually “yeah, butting”: To move the discussion forward, we need to listen and build on the ideas that other people share. Continually, yeah butting, prevents us from developing our ideas. Let’s try to listen and support each other.