

Dealing with challenging situations in meetings

1. The person that is always speaking at the expense of others

- Prevent by having a pre-meeting discussion. “Like me, you feel strongly about this issue, but we need to ensure that we hear everyone’s views on this issue.”
- Let them have their say first, then say “I’d like to hear from someone who hasn’t had a say yet.” (This gives the person a boundary and encourages others to speak up).
- “I think we need to hear from everyone on this issue, so can we quickly go around the group so everyone can have their say.”
- “I’m aware of the time, so I think we need to move on.”
- Just because someone talks too much, doesn’t mean that they don’t have something very useful to contribute, so be sure to summarise and acknowledge the relevant points they make.

2. The person/people who are always complaining about something but don’t step up to do anything

- Ask them what the positives are, or the potentials and how they could contribute to changing things. “What could we do from here?” Don’t move on until it’s addressed.
- Remind the group that we can’t solve problems unless we have the energy to do something about it? Ask “Who cares enough about this to take some action?”
- If others are not interested in pursuing the issue, acknowledge that the person obviously feels very strongly about the idea and offer them the chance to present the idea more fully at future meeting.
- Ask the person who was complaining to scope the issue using the scoping document. Follow up after the meeting to see if they need any guidance.

3. The person who talks too much and goes off track

- This can be very annoying and de-energise a group.
- Be patient at first as some people take more words to get to the point.
- When they start to go off track, find a pause in their sentence then say, ‘We are starting to move in a different direction, so we might leave it there and see if anyone else wants to say anything, but thanks’ and summarise the relevance of their comment. “Clive is saying that... What do others think?”
- Give time limits before you open the discussion. “We need to hear from as many people as possible on this, so please keep your comments very brief.”

4. People who have side meetings

- Glance in their direction and go quiet.
- Let them finish their conversation.
- Ask their opinion about topic.
- “I am having trouble concentrating – can we please have one person speaking at a time?”
- Sit beside them next time.
- Discuss privately after meeting or at the break.