

INTERVENTIONS

Sample Interventions for More Productive Groups

*Adapted and expanded from *How to Make Meetings Work* by Michael Doyle and David Strauss

Time challenged

The Chronic Latecomer: Wait until after the meeting and ask if there are reasons they are always late. Don't lecture. Ask what can be done to make the meetings run better so that they will be on time. If nothing else works, give them a job up front at a future meeting.

The Chronic Early Leaver: In a side conversation, ask if a change in the meeting format will allow complete attendance. Refer to the ground rules, or at the beginning of the next meeting ask if everyone can be there for the full time to state the expectations of the group.

Distracters

The Side Converser: Move closer, maybe touch the table. Then: "Let's keep a single focus on this topic."

The Loudmouth: Move closer, maintaining eye contact while they are talking.

The Interpreter: When someone interjects to clarify the comments of someone else, ask the original speaker if that interpretation is correct.

The Multi-taskers: In today's wired world, we need to address use of cell phones and PDAs up front in participant guidelines. The group may want to establish this as a function to occur during breaks. If participants know when a break is coming, they are better able to resist the lure of the screen. To curb use by rogue texters, try these strategies: refer to the accepted ground rules; get groups up and interacting away from desks; position yourself by them; or ask them a question, calling them by name.

Experts

The Broken Record: Give air time to someone worked up and hanging onto an issue. "Why don't we take three minutes now to hear what you have got to say? We want to know everyone heard you and we want you to be able to move along with us through the rest of the meeting."

The Doubting Thomas: Ask the group not to evaluate any ideas until all of the evidence is in. If interruptive, refer to the ground rules. If they are skeptical of the process, show that you heard them and ask them to hang in there for ten minutes to see where it can get.

The Headshaker: If someone gives repeated negative cues, check in on the process with them. It can be asked in a neutral way or if it's overt, ask if they are disturbed with the process.

INTERVENTIONS continued

The Know –It–All: “We recognize and respect your experience, but the group has to make the decision after weighing the alternatives.”

The Backseat Driver: Ask them for process recommendations and shift if the group’s will.

Non-participants

The Best-Buddies: Breaking up comfortable groups of people can increase the flow of new ideas and strengthen bonds more broadly across a team. To mix it up, assign seats or groups, allow random pairings by having participants count off, or ask participants to partner with someone they don’t know.

The Wallflower: To elicit input from quiet participants, have everyone write down a response and then have everyone in the group read out their responses in a round robin. You can also give warning that you will call on a person who hasn’t participated. “We’ll here from Joe and then I’d like to hear from some new voices: Sue and then Bob.” Alternatively, you can do work in pairs and very small groups.

The Dropout: Ask a question. Queue up the person who seems to have dropped out to give them a chance to be heard. “We’ll hear from Mary, then Bob (The Dropout).” It will let them be heard, and the issue may emerge. If not, see below.

The Obstinate Bystander: There are a variety of reasons for someone to want to be part of a group but not take part in its activities or follow their norms. Most are not valid. If the person is working to change the group, the group can hear out their desires and decide. If the person isn’t willing to work to effect change, but is still not participating, then it is best for that person to leave the group, and for the group to make the decision and the request. The facilitator can highlight these options, focus on the ground rules, and point back to the group process.

And occasionally...

The Attacker: Redirect attacks from the personal level to the content level. These attacks are often subtle so be alert and watch for body language clues. Refer to ground rules if applicable.

The Agenda Hiders: Hidden agendas rarely stay hidden. If someone is heavily invested in one outcome, try getting it written down as an option. Once everyone understands that option, engage the whole group in identifying additional options to add to the list. Being clear about which phase of the decision process the group will help prevent the one option from being pushed through before the group is ready.

The Bad Day: Sometimes a group is not working well together. The cause could be any one of these. Check in with them by asking if you can give the group some feedback. Then point to the problem with the group and work with them to identify the underlying cause.