



Top Tips for dealing with difficult people in meetings

As Chair, you might need to deal with 'difficult' people – these might include the 'non-stop talker' or the 'know-it-alls', or people with a particular axe to grind (which may not be relevant to any of the agenda items!) Setting meeting rules from the outset will establish a set of acceptable behaviours which will help you conduct the meeting effectively. All attendees must agree to adhere to these rules - or they'll be useless. The benefit of this approach is that people will be less likely to take offence or take it personally if asked not to interrupt, for example, or as a means for keeping conversations on topic.

Examples of meeting rules

- Ask people to speak through the chair. This means putting their hand up if they want to speak, and waiting for the chair to say it's their turn
- No interrupting when other people are speaking
- Stick to the item on the agenda
- Don't engage in secondary conversations
- Respect other people's views –wait until they've finished and then put your point of view across calmly and politely
- Keep contributions short and to the point
- Keep meetings to 90 minutes in length
- Start and finish the meeting on time

A group can take a while to get used to the meeting rules, even if they have agreed them. If it doesn't work perfectly first time, persist.

- At every meeting, reiterate the meeting rules, and that everyone has agreed to these
- Be firm and consistent – don't allow difficult people to get away with things
- If two people get into a heated discussion, summarise the points made by each, then re-focus the discussion by inviting other people opinions about the issues
- When someone keeps repeating the same point, assure them that their point has been heard, and then turn the discussion back to the group
- If someone is continually criticising try to turn the question round to them eg "what would you do in this situation?"
- If you have to deal with someone who will not moderate their disruptive behaviour, despite having tried the tactics listed previously, try asking the group for support eg 'do people want to spend more time on this discussion or move on to the next topic?' This should make it clear to the disruptive individual that everyone, not just the chairperson, wants to move on.

TEAMWORK RESPECT ENJOYMENT DISCIPLINE SPORTSMANSHIP