

# Maintaining Healthy Team Dynamics

The key to maintaining healthy team dynamics is to understand the phases of development of the group process. They are as follows:

## **1. Polite**

Members avoid controversy, share acceptable ideas and avoid serious discussion.

## **2. Purpose**

When one or more members ask, "What are we really doing here?" Future difficulties can be avoided by using some time to elicit the feelings of group members about the purpose.

## **3. Power**

Members might make a bid to have some influence over the procedures and life of the group. Legitimate competition is taking place and needs to be handled if the group is not to become stalled and sow seeds of serious difficulty. The "bids" for power need to be taken seriously, responded to and resolved; otherwise the group will stall here.

## **4. Constructive**

Members work well together, listen to one another, clarify issues and exhibit mutual trust, support and respect.

## **5. Team spirit**

Morale is high, with strong loyalty to and pride in one another. More can be accomplished by the group than by individuals.

It is essential to fit the leadership style to the maturity of the group. Leadership must respond to the needs of the group, doing what the group is not doing for itself. The leader who misreads a group, who duplicates what the group is already doing well, or who does not have the skills to provide what is lacking will be responsible for perpetuating many difficulties in the life of that group. Effective prevention of difficulties is often a result of good judgment and skills of the leader.

The following are situations that can arise in a group and some strategies for dealing with each.

### **Situation Strategy**

#### **The nonstop talker:**

Talks so much he or she prevents others from talking. Be attentive to the talker; he or she probably has good ideas. Always look to people away from the talker for contributions. You, as the leader, must control contributions that inhibit other contributions.

#### **The overly helpful member:**

Always responds quickly to requests, using this as a subtle way to direct the group. Voice appreciation for his or her suggestions. Look immediately to others to lead off in the discussion. Look to others to be the first to contribute. Suggest that he or she is "working too hard" and ask for responses from others in the group.

**The bored or indifferent member:**

Feels he or she is not being heard. Call on him or her, pointing out his or her competence, experience or expertise on one or more topics of discussion. Try to focus on a strength and ask for a contribution from that base.

**A team member is quiet and noncontributing for quite a while:**

He or she seems successful and competent but is silent in group situations. Some people find it hard to contribute in a group. Don't push too hard. Offer encouragement occasionally so that he or she knows you value his or her contributions. It is less important that the team member talks readily than that he or she stays close to the group. Be patient.

**The shy, hesitant team member:**

This team member is afraid to contribute. Ask direct questions that you think she or he can answer. Support the responses if you honestly can.

**Team member is not disposed to help others:**

He or she wants other team members to pull their own weight and not depend upon them. This kind of person needs to be recognized. Privately let the team member know how much you appreciate having him or her in the group and how much you think he or she can contribute to the group. Continue to try to draw him or her out.

**Team members who hold conversations on the side during team meetings:**

This can be the source of considerable distraction. Don't let the team member hold a side conversation with you! As leader, you can pause and look at them until they quit talking, or ask them if they have something valuable to add to the discussion. The goal is to let the whisperer know that this kind of behavior is not acceptable in this group without making a big issue of it.

**Team members who have a poor voice or a poor choice of words:**

This person might mumble when speaking or feel too uneducated for the group. Protect him or her from group ridicule. Give his or her comments recognition and support.

**Team member who is definitely wrong but not willing to be corrected:**

If wrong information is irrelevant to the group, simply say, "Okay, thank you," and go on with the agenda. If the error could damage group work, take time to clarify the error.

**Personality clashes:** The leader or another team member needs to cut into the dispute by pointing out that there are certainly different ways of looking at a topic and both perceptions can be valuable to the team. If properly understood and appreciated, a personality conflict can become an asset rather than a problem for a team.

**The mumblor who rambles on and on, getting off the topic:**

This person needs an audience and uses the team meetings to procure one. Intervene when the team member stops to take a breath, thank him or her for the contribution, and quickly move on by asking another team member a question.

**The arguer:**

This team member likes to disagree, and joins groups to start arguments. Recognize that the objections might be legitimate. Ask for clarification. If this behavior persists, sit beside the team member and pretend not to hear him or her. If the behavior continues, talk to him or her privately, asking for his or her help and giving a specific task for the session so you can thank him or her when the task is finished. If all of these efforts fail, call on the group by asking if the group wants to spend time now on the complaints.

**A team member who constantly speaks off the subject:**

This is usually easy to handle, as the team member is not hostile or argumentative. Continually redirect the group discussion after thanking the team member for his or her thoughts. You might have to tell the team member you will take his or her topic up at another time.

**A team member who gripes about leadership or authority (usually in country):**

Help the team to recognize what can be accomplished within limitations. Discuss worthwhile goals that can be accomplished within the present parameters.

**A team member who has overwhelming personal problems:**

Personal problems should be handled personally. Do not allow the team member to say things in the group setting that he or she will be embarrassed about later.

**Survival strategies for team leaders**

The best way to deal with difficulties in a group is to prevent them from arising.

- Help team members become aware of the group process. Use this awareness to reflect on the workings of the group for a short time at each meeting.
- Be sensitive to the level of maturity of the group.
- Share leadership with team members so that they feel a sense of responsibility for accomplishing the tasks of the team and help to maintain positive relationships.
- Handle each difficult situation with objectivity and empathy. Don't take problems personally. Don't try to solve difficulties all by yourself.

**Tips for addressing inappropriate behavior**

- During the team orientation, direct team members to bring problems, concerns or issues to the team leader first.
- Address situations first with the team member on a one-on-one basis.
  - Identify the inappropriate behavior with the team member.
  - Help the team member understand the potential negative effects of the inappropriate behavior.
- If a team member continues inappropriate behavior, it might be necessary to involve other team members or the host coordinator (depending on the situation).
- If inappropriate behavior persists, remind the team member that he or she agreed to the participant acknowledgement as part of the application.

