

THE MANNING NEWSLETTER

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Keynote Presentation/Workshop Useful for Anyone Leading a Meeting or a Team

I am currently offering my new workshop, "Handling the Unexpected" (including "difficult people") based on my newly released book: *The One-Stop Guide to Workshops*. I recently presented this workshop in Hawaii, Malaysia, and within the continental United States.

This presentation covers how to skillfully handle unexpected problem situations on teams, at meetings, presentations, workshops, or trainings. I address how to skillfully handle the unforeseen elements that could arise at any meeting or presentation...from the unruly participant, a logistical glitch, to some unpredictable event that might threaten your smooth progress.

In any group or team, one "bad apple" can spoil the bushel. There are six common forms of disruptive behavior. Here are some appropriate responses to these behaviors:

Aggressors wage open warfare. They may challenge the ideas being presented, their relevance to the situation at hand, or your credibility as leader. Aggressors need to be calmed down; I suggest this three-step approach, which allows you to escalate your own response if the attack continues.

- Ask for clarification.
- Empathize with the Aggressor's anger.
- Rally the group or others to your support.

Old Pros have strong opinions and like to express them. Their knowledge can be useful, but their behavior becomes disruptive when they prohibit other people from contributing. Your goal is to contain their contribution within reasonable bounds.

- Acknowledge and move away.
- Make them an ally.

Guerrillas don't threaten openly because they don't speak up. Instead, they ambush a meeting or workshop by distracting everyone from the subject at hand. Your approach is to shine a spotlight not on their insecurities but on their behavior.

- Call attention to their actions.
- Escalate your response by calling on them more forcefully.

For **Cry Babys**, everything is wrong, unfair, hopeless. They are unhappy and discouraged. Your goal isn't to change the Cry Baby's personality, but to keep them from draining energy from the rest of the group.

- Acknowledge and legitimize their concern.
- Ask for the Cry Baby's solution.
- Open the floor to the entire group.

Stone Walls just sit there. They watch you impassively, or they may avoid eye contact by doodling or looking away. They aren't disturbing anyone, but they aren't participating either. My suggestion is to proceed carefully until you understand the situation.

- Invite this person and others to respond.
- Try to find out why the person is quiet.
- Tailor your response to the situation.
- **Nice Guys** are friendly, helpful, and want to be liked.

The problem is that they are every bit as quiet as the Stone Wall. Your job is to try to draw out their real feelings and thoughts.

- Show a personal interest.
- Ask them "how" or "why" questions.
- Call on their experience.

Whether you find the "bad apple" on your team or in a meeting, knowing these strategies can save you time and prevent undue stress.

What if "the worst nightmare" happens at your meeting? Your entire group is hostile or unresponsive. Group disruptive behavior can take several forms, which roughly approximate those described for individuals. Dealing with groupwide disruptive behavior is different from dealing with a single problem individual. The same techniques won't work. The emotional climate, and specifically your mood, are likely to be different. The question is: What will you do with that anger? I suggest the following:

- Take time to cool off. Don't say anything in the heat of anger. During a break, find a quiet place where you can be alone and think.
- Imagine how you might use your anger constructively. Consider that the problem may go away as soon as you draw attention to it. A controlled expression of honest anger or frustration is so rare that it can shock people into behaving differently.
- Ask for their solutions. If the problem continues after you have told them of your anger, try this:
 - Call a time out and tell them that "we have a problem"; explain the problem as you see it.
 - Then, express your frustration.
 - Ask them how they see the situation and listen.
 - Be sure that you understand their point of view.
 - Ask them what we should do now.

These are just a few band-aid actions I address in my new workshop, my new book, and my keynotes.

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Marilyn Manning, Ph.D. of Growth Seminars, Inc. is an international speaker, trainer, consultant and author. She is a recognized expert in the areas of communication, leadership, team building, and managing conflict and change. She offers keynote presentations as well as workshops, consulting, and staff development.

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