



Beth Israel Lahey Health

Addressing Challenging Behaviors in Virtual Meetings

Off Tracking

Behaviors

- Discusses topics that are not on the agenda or don't support desired outcomes
- Jumps ahead in the agenda or returns to a prior topic

Preventions

- Create an agenda with specific topics and time limits.
- Use a virtual parking lot (a places to record items being deferred) to take issues off the table. One option is to use the Zoom Whiteboard; be sure to save this each time you add an item.

Interventions

- Address quickly and firmly.
- Summarize key points and ask for confirmation that you've captured their thoughts and then move on.
- Redirect discussion. For example, *"Sounds like that is a bit off our agenda today, let's put this in the virtual parking lot. That way we can be sure we get through everything we planned to talk about."*
- Take blame. *"Something I said may have led you to mention that, which is not the subject of our conversation right now. This is what we are discussing."* Restate your point.
- Ask person to help the group understand how their comments relate to the topic.

Non-Talking

Behaviors

- Only speaks if asked a direct question
- Responds in short, clipped answers
- Seems unwilling to contribute at all
- Appears to be doing other work during the meeting

Preventions

- Tell the person that they are valuable to meeting and you look forward to their participation.
- Invite them to be a note-taker.
- Before the meeting, assign the role of drawing out the reluctant participant to one or two group members.

Interventions

- Call on person by name, and ask for their opinion (e.g., ask the silent participant to react to someone else's statement).
- Compliment or encourage the participant the first time they talk.
- Ask for participant's view after indicating respect for their experience (but don't overdo this!)
- Ask questions related to the silent participant's areas of expertise and interest.
- Ask people to write down ideas first and then hear from everyone.
- Reduce the anxiety level by using an alternative format. Use Zoom Breakout Groups for small group discussions.
- Send a private Chat message - host or moderator - to encourage participation (e.g., *"You seem quiet today. Are you OK?"*).

Monopolizing

Behaviors

- Comments on every topic
- Talks a lot when given the opportunity
- Repeats their own viewpoints throughout meeting
- Jumps in with challenging questions before you have finished your thoughts

Preventions

- Include a ground rule that promotes hearing from everyone.
- Remind participants that there can be a delay due to technology and suggest to allow pauses.
- Ensure each person has a chance to weigh in on a topic (e.g., pair and share using Zoom Chat, one at a time).
- Speak to someone ahead of time who continuously demonstrates this behavior in your meetings. May be a performance discussion, if reports to you, or the type where you acknowledge and thank them for their many contributions, yet let them know you'd like to be able to hear from everyone in the meetings.
- Ask this person to be a note-taker.

Interventions

- Acknowledge and redirect, (interrupting as necessary): *"That's an interesting point. Now let's see what the group thinks of it."*
- Be gentle and tactful, so as not to offend.
- Call on a few people you haven't heard from.
- Use techniques to engage everyone:
 - Ask group to take 2 minutes to jot down their ideas, issues, or recommendations. Then, ask each person to share one comment.
 - Use a virtual round robin technique; invite each person by name to share a comment and address the participant in question toward the end. "This is such an important issue that I want to be sure I'm getting everyone's ideas. Let's do a quick virtual round robin starting with Jill..."
 - Break the group into pairs and let them discuss an issue (using private Chat function) before initiating a large group discussion.
- Encourage reflection by providing some difficult questions.

Interrupting

Behaviors

- Cuts others off while they are still talking
- Has side-conversations

Preventions

- Include a ground rule that says “one at a time”, or “no interrupting”.

Interventions

- Remind attendees of the ground rule.
- Ask interrupter to restate what someone else has said to help them listen.
- If interruption is relevant, cut it short and redirect with: *“Hold that thought, until we hear the rest of what John has to say.”*
- Say *“Thank you, however I would like to hear the end of Linda’s comment.”*

Resisting / Critiquing

Behaviors

- Shuts down possibilities, “That will never work here.” “We’ve tried this before and we all know it doesn’t work.”
- Negatively evaluates others’ ideas without acknowledging merit or anything positive about them

Preventions

- Include a ground rule that says “be open”, or “build upon others ideas”.
- Before the meeting, have a firm but friendly talk about your expectations. Explain how the participant’s judgmental comments can inhibit the flow of ideas from others and that you want suggestions, not criticism.

Interventions

- Acknowledge opinion and ask for group to respond.
- Ask for a solution or way to tackle the issue.
- For example, use *boomerang* technique by not directly answering their question and returning to area of resistance. *“What ideas do you have for how we can...?”*
- Use “accept, validate, deal with or defer” technique to acknowledge and validate:
 - **Accept:** Acknowledge what you heard (without necessarily agreeing)
 - **Validate:** “I understand you’re passionate about that...”
 - **Deal with or defer:** Choose to address in the moment, or defer with: “The issue you just raised sounds like an important one to you, but it’s not on our agenda. Because it’s critical to get through these agenda items, we’ll pick that up at our next meeting. Is that acceptable to you?”

More Tips

...for addressing challenging behaviors

- Lead meetings with the mindset that people generally come from a good place; assume that there’s value in their contributions.
- Recognize that the vast majority of questions posed at a meeting “mask” ideas or concerns.
- Don’t underestimate the power of ground rules. They provide an effective way of addressing problematic behaviors.
- Address behavior problems soon after they occur and in a consistent fashion, so that you don’t inadvertently reward or give permission for more of the same behaviors.
- Don’t confuse “conflict” with meaningful discussion. Differences of opinion are not necessarily synonymous with conflict. It is often the difference of opinion, which provides valuable insights.
- Allow others to resolve some of their own issues. You do not need to referee every disagreement.
- Stay positive.....