



## **Dealing with Difficult Participants**

As Trainers, everyone has at least had one situation in which they had to deal with a difficult “participant”. Because a participant that is difficult can disrupt the entire session, it is important to first identify and then minimize their impact on the group as quickly as possible.

Perhaps the easiest way to get a difficult participant to become part of the group is to make them a part of the group. One way is to acknowledge the individual and ask them if they would like to assist in the presentation. If they agree, give them a function with some responsibility, such as being your “assistant” for handouts, or writing thoughts on the board.

Another approach is to break the groups down into small groups of six or so. This is small enough that each individual will have some room to participate and large enough for the group to moderate a difficult individual. Make sure your teaching content does not exceed 20 minutes because most learners will lose attention after that time. You should also seek to involve the participants every 10 minutes with an experiential exercise, game, role play, or small group activity. This can diffuse a difficult individual by making them actively participate in a peer group.

By choosing and rotating group leaders you can also minimize the impact of a difficult individual. You can do this a number of ways: by age (oldest to youngest or youngest to oldest), seniority (most years with company to lowest or vice versa) or alphabetical. Either way, by having everyone take their turn as leader and rotating, the potential for disruptions can be minimized.

Of course there are some other, more severe options, but getting the difficult individual to become a part of the process increases the odds of creating a win-win situation for everyone.

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