









COMMON MEETING PROBLEMS & SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

You may not be able to predict all the bad things that could happen in a meeting. But there are some general patterns of meeting flow and participant behavior you can prepare for. To manage common meeting problems, be prepared with these techniques:

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
<p>LATE ARRIVALS, EARLY DEPARTURES</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give people jobs to do during future meetings, which will secure their time.• As the meeting begins, ask if everyone can stay until the designated end time. If not, consider adjusting the length of the meeting.• After the meeting, privately ask latecomers or early leavers why they missed part of the meeting. Develop solutions, such as giving them earlier notice of a meeting if they tend to double-book.
<p>CONVERSATION DOMINATORS</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move closer to the person who's dominating. That draws the group's attention away from that person and toward you.• Thank the person for the input. Then call on someone else.• If the person finishes other people's sentences, encourage the individual to let others speak for themselves.• Ask the person to jot down any thoughts and wait for a pause to contribute them, instead of shouting them out.
<p>REPETITION</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep track of agreed-upon points on a flip chart or whiteboard.• Point to the chart or board and say, "It looks like we've already covered that. Is there something new people want to add?"• If people continue repeating a point, say, "This is obviously important to the group. So let's deal with it now."
<p>STUCK GROUP</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the group what's going on. If the group is stuck because it lacks information or clarity about the item, provide what's needed.• Suggest a short break, then return to the topic at hand. Or move it to a later position on the agenda or to another meeting.

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<p data-bbox="196 428 370 453">DISRUPTION</p> 	<ul data-bbox="586 422 1430 625" style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the ground rules for behavior, such as “No interrupting” or “No taking phone calls during the meeting.”• Remind everyone of the meeting’s focus: “We need to shape our innovation strategy for the year. Let’s concentrate on that.”• If the problem continues, call for a break. During the break, ask people individually what’s going on.
<p data-bbox="224 823 342 848">SILENCE</p> 	<ul data-bbox="586 814 1544 995" style="list-style-type: none">• Allow silence for a while. The group may need time to reflect on an idea or their feelings about an issue.• Say, “I notice you’ve fallen silent. Can someone explain what’s happening?”• Ask people if they’d like you to clarify something.• If the group seems tired, consider ending the meeting and rescheduling.
<p data-bbox="212 1113 350 1138">CONFLICT</p> 	<ul data-bbox="586 1104 1536 1360" style="list-style-type: none">• Call an immediate halt to any bickering. If necessary, take a break and speak to the contenders individually.• Let all team members know it’s fine to be passionate. But encourage them to keep comments constructive and to try to see all sides of a contentious issue.• Reaffirm agreed-upon rules for behavior, such as “No insults.”• Use probing questions to uncover concerns underlying entrenched positions.• As a last resort, ask the contenders to leave the meeting.
<p data-bbox="199 1495 363 1520">AVOIDANCE</p> 	<ul data-bbox="586 1486 1544 1675" style="list-style-type: none">• Raise the issue to get the group moving.• Ask participants to precisely describe the problem.• Find out how long the problem has existed, who’s involved, and what’s at stake.• Thank participants who bring up a controversial viewpoint.• Let the group know it’s critical to bring up even difficult issues.