

Missions to Mexico

Training Resources

Dealing with Problem Members

Students in classes and on mission trips often find themselves a part of a group or team assigned to a specific task. In the classroom, such groups may digest case studies, discuss textbook material and even prepare presentations to be given to the rest of the class. Those groups have two dimensions: the assigned task and the interpersonal dynamics that nourish us in all kinds of ways. Unfortunately, not all teams or groups work well. Groups may wind up frustrated, stuck or squabbling. Some find it difficult to retain focus and motivation because some people are preoccupied with their personal agendas. Groups may be troubled by lack of cohesiveness, by cliques or by one-upmanship. Or, the behavior of one member can sometimes drive all the other group members "up the wall." With apologies to Snow White and her dwarf friends, here's a list of problem characters who can damage work groups.

Busy

Busy can't make the meeting, no matter when it's scheduled. She says she's willing to contribute, but she has a busy schedule and lots to do. So, she tells the group to carry on without her. She will do her part, she says, as long as they let her know what that is.

Wily

Wily is an alibi artist. He has excuses for all the responsibilities he doesn't carry through on and all the meetings he misses. Some suspect he's a bit of a conniver or con artist.

Smugly

Smugly doesn't much trust other people and their ability to do things the way she thinks they ought to be done. So, she does everything herself. Whenever someone offers to help, she smoothly puts them off: "It's no problem. Everything is under control. Not to worry." The less others in the group are involved, the happier Smugly seems to be. Delegate is not a verb she uses. No one knows whether Smugly acts the way she does because she is a perfectionist or because she is an egomaniac.

Clock

Clock comes to meetings and participates, but he always has to leave early for some other engagement.

Quietly

Quietly comes to group meetings very well prepared, but she is so quiet that people often forget she's there. Her ideas would really help the group, but unless someone calls on her, Quietly doesn't say anything.

Absently

Nobody has seen nor hair of Absently. He isn't even coming to class anymore. He hasn't tried to contact anybody else in the group. As project deadlines loom ahead, the other members ask themselves: What should we do about Absently?

Slacky

Lacking motivation and initiative, this listless group member is a sloppy contributor at best. At worst, he's dead weight.

Jokey

Jokey enjoys being with people. He's always there when the group gets together. Trouble is, he gets the group off track. He cannot stay focused on task.

Whiney

No matter what she is asked to do, Whiney complains. She is an expert at finding clouds in silver linings!

Wordy

Wordy monopolizes meetings. He has good ideas, but he talks and talks and talks. An outsider observing the group would see Wordy doing eighty percent or more of the talking.

Bossy

Bossy definitely "contributes" to the group. His ideas are good and he's always ready to offer them. However, Bossy doesn't listen to the ideas of others; he's an obnoxious jerk who forces his solutions on the group. At the first meeting this know-it-all tries to take charge and push and push until the group goes in the direction he thinks best (even though others in the group may not agree). Bossy has no idea there's a difference between "being the boss" and leading people.

Tardily

Tardily always shows up late. Sometimes she doesn't show at all. She never quite gets her share of the work done on time. Even on the day her group has to do some kind of presentation in front of an audience, Tardily will probably show up late.

Edgy

Edgy's negative attitude -- about what she's supposed to be doing at the moment, about group project ideas, and even about life in general -- drags down group morale. Edgy can be a temperamental terror.

Pokey

Pokey hasn't developed good brainstorming skills. Pokey doesn't listen real well and her powers of discernment need honing. Groups find Pokey lagging behind when creative juices are flowing.