

Reducing Conflict 17 Get a Word in Edgewise

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Do you have trouble getting a word in edgewise when dealing with a compulsive talker? Some people have a habit of constantly talking. It may not seem like a big deal, but if you have a compulsive talker on your group, he or she can cause all kinds of problems.

The first problem is that they tie up people from doing their work. It really saps productivity when you are constantly distracted by someone rambling on. It can also affect group productivity in certain circumstances.

The second problem is that often the tone of the excessive talker can be negative. This not only ties people up, it lowers morale because of all the negative points. Often the person will pit one group of people against another, sowing division. This problem leads to silo thinking, which is another form of productivity loss.

What Can be Done

Trying to retrain a compulsive talker is usually a vexing task. The talker does not even realize there is a problem. If you try to explain the negative influence, you will usually encounter denial. If you suggest the talker just keep quiet for at least 70% of the time, there may be in agreement to try, but the habit will likely not change very much.

One technique is to appeal to the person's more noble instincts and suggest that if others took up that much air time nothing would get done. Other people have a right to be heard as well.

Isolating the talker in a remote area is one possible solution, but it really is ineffective because the person always finds a way to communicate anyway.

The best defense is to screen out people who have this problem during the interview process. They are really quite easy to spot, so you can save yourself a lot of grief by not having the person on the team at all.

If you have a rather mature team and members are complaining about the talker, you might try a candid discussion during a group meeting. Invent some kind of signal that people can use when the talker is rambling on. That can work, or it can backfire depending on the particular culture within the group.

Examples

I once had a customer service person who had this problem. I tried to get her to see that she was not doing her fair share of the work because she was always chatting with her mates. I finally isolated her and gave her more work to do in order to keep her relatively quiet. These ideas were only partially successful, and she did not appreciate the increased workload.

I know a man in our local grocery store who has the problem. He is constantly chatting with the various customers as a way to express friendliness. For me, he is a huge distraction, and I try to avoid him at all costs. I'm not sure if some people enjoy his constant blithering, but I sure don't.

Some Training Programs

There are some training programs to help people [speak more succinctly](#). These might be effective in some percentage of cases, but most compulsive talkers would not really want to change, so the training would not be very effective.

Conclusion

Having a constant talker on your team can be a challenging problem to solve. Some of the techniques suggested may be helpful, but none of them would work equally well for all people. You need to try different approaches and stick with the one that works best for that person.

Free Video

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on how to deal with a Compulsive Talker.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X--gb3IDAa0>

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