

# Effective Leadership – Leadership Communication Styles

## **Handling Group Discussions**

The majority of work accomplished at meetings is done through group discussion. This is significant as discussions are a time where everyone has the opportunity to contribute to a group. Group discussion is actually more beneficial to your organization than when one individual is working on a project. The ideas generated within a group often don't come alive when one person is working alone. Yet, discussion time within a meeting is also the time when frustrations build.

How can you avoid being frustrated yet still have a productive meeting? Identify why the group is having the discussion. There are three reasons for having a discussion: to gather information, to exchange ideas and to solve problems. If you know why you are discussing the issue, it's easier to participate, keep the discussion on track and get results. Be aware of how the discussion is progressing. Two things can be happening during a discussion: the development of information, ideas or issues, or the evaluation of information, ideas or issues.

Usually, developing and evaluating gets mixed together. This is where you can run into problems like discussions that go around in circles and frustrated participants. It can look like this: one person makes a suggestion, the second person says it's good, the third person says it's not good and a debate follows. The suggestion is tossed out and the leader asks for another suggestion. It's good, it's not good, it gets tossed out. After this happens a few times the group is tired, everyone stays quiet, time is used up and there are no results.

To avoid this scenario, you need to get the ideas out first or develop the information, ideas or issue. Don't let people evaluate at this stage or it will discourage participation. After the ideas are out, then evaluate. This progression keeps the group moving forward and avoids having a similar debate for each idea or comment. Keeping development and evaluation separate also helps in avoiding the trap of the first idea or the last idea (the survivor of a half hour of frustrating debates) being the best idea. If you only have one idea, of course it looks like the best idea.

## **Handling Difficult Conversations**

The best intentions of a leader for keeping a meeting within a reasonable time frame can be destroyed if members put obstacles in the way.

An **orator** is an able speaker who likes to practice his speaking skills and may tend to talk for a long time. The leader must judge how much time is enough for this person and then get his attention by saying something like, "Excuse me, Jack, but we're running short of time and several other members have some points they would like to make. We'd all appreciate it if you could wind up your comments in the next minute or two. Thank you very much."

A **wanderer** tends to bring up an entirely unrelated topic. A leader can get the meeting back on track by saying something like, "Linda, I'm sorry to break in like this, but I think that you're getting away from the subject. Remember we'd like to settle the issue of \_\_\_\_ and we would appreciate it if you could confine your remarks to that subject. Thanks."

The **repeater** talks numerous times on the same subject while other members haven't had a chance to talk. You can give the person a rest and the others a chance to talk by saying something similar to, "Dave, before we hear from you again I would like to know how Debbie and Rick feel about this subject. Thank you." An alternative could be to go around the table in turn and ask for others' comments on the subject.

An **interrupter** tends to interrupt others as they are speaking on a subject. The leader may have to interrupt the interrupter by saying, "Before you say anything more, Jason, please wait until Shirley has finished and you then will have an opportunity to make your point. Thank you."