

THE DIRTY DOZEN

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Self-Managed Teams, TQM, Task forces all these are the buzzwords of today. More and more emphasis is being placed on working in groups. But how effective are groups in achieving their goals? And how well do we participate in groups?

The factor deciding group success is participation of its members. But very often we mistake "attendance" for "participation".

Enumerated below are the different types of people one may encounter in organizational meetings, who are likely to jeopardize the proceedings and hold the entire team to ransom. This list is by no means exhaustive but it highlights some common behaviors to watch out for. Read on to see where you fit in...

1. **Latecomer** : The latecomer is always late for all meetings. He not only disturbs the proceedings by his entry, but also expects, time and again to be briefed about the happenings before he arrived.
2. **Consultant / Expert** : The consultant does not feel he is part of the group, he feels his job is only to make expert comments from time to time and to give his expert opinion. When he is not giving his opinion he adopts a "let's see what happens" attitude by distancing himself from the group. He does not come up with any new ideas and neither does he use those of others. All he knows is-- opinions : his own, to be voiced and those of others to be evaluated.

3. **Boss / Hijacker** : This person is the self appointed boss. Usually he does have some formal or informal power over the others. This man considers himself the shepherd and the other members his flock to be herded around as he pleases. He hijacks and coordinates the entire discussion, and makes sure his voice is heard most of the time.
4. **Yea Yea man** : This man never learnt to say "no". Usually seen hovering around the boss, this man agrees to all the proposals in the group however ridiculous.
5. **Nay Nay man / Soothsayer** : As if to compensate for the "yes man" we also have this category. This person religiously opposes all for all proposals for absolutely no reason except by force of habit. In a slightly modified form he becomes the "soothsayer" whose favorite phrase is "Beware !!! (*the Ides of March*)" followed by "I told you so". Often this person is politely referred to as the Devil's Advocate and deliberately brought in to compensate for a majority of "yes men".
6. **Handy Man / Valet** : The valet considers it his moral duty to see to it that every one is comfortable. Often he feels that he can best contribute by making the others happy. He is seen running to get chairs, serving tea, setting up the projector and running errands. If there is no limit on team size, he is a useful character to have around.
7. **Jester** : The jester has the ability to convert any situation or idea into a joke. In general he disrupts the proceedings and no work gets done.
8. **Busy bee** : This man sits through meetings in between receiving calls on his mobile phone / pager or doing his "home-work"(work unconnected with the task

on hand). When he does attend he shows his impatience by constantly looking at his watch, drumming the table, humming a tune or vibrating his leg.

9. **Cry Baby** : The cry baby has some "problem" which keeps getting connected to all issues on hand. He steers all conversations so that he can somehow tell us his own "sob story". He resembles a crying baby whose favorite toy is broken and can't think of any thing else.
10. **Sleeper / Screen Saver** : The sleeper uses the meeting as a good opportunity to catch up on lost sleep and snoozes throughout the proceedings. A close cousin to the sleeper is the "screen saver", who, during dull moments is on his own trip and has to be woken up from time to time. A highly accomplished person of this category can even sleep with his eyes open.
11. **Nitpicker** : Nitpickers adore trivia and the nitty gritty. They listen very carefully to all that is being said, and at the slightest opportunity cling onto the most insignificant bit of trivia and use it to point out drawbacks in the other persons' idea. They have the ability to blank out the whole picture from their mind and concentrate deeply on the "finer" details.
12. **Phantom** : This person is different from all the above, in that, despite being a member of the team, being related to the "busy bee" he decides to remain chronically absent. When told to attend by others he frequently responds with "You guys carry on, I'll see if I can make it ". Needless to say he is always too busy to "make it" and the others have to "make do" without him.

We have seen above twelve categories of trouble makers, "The Dirty Dozen". It must be

borne in mind that none of these are constant and each of us may become any of these in different situations, at different times and with different people. More correctly these are roles which we all play to avoid the discomfort of listening to others, making decisions, confronting certain issues or simply to avoid boredom.

For any team to be successful, it requires the committed involvement and participation of all its members. All the above behaviors hamper the team effort.

So how do we have team members' committed involvement and participation in a meeting?

Here's how:

1. **Generate Awareness:** The first step is to make everyone aware of these behaviors so that they can catch themselves in the middle of their act. The "Dirty Dozen" list should be freely circulated and every one should be clear on what each term means.

Also people must be made to realize how these behaviors prevent the group progress and are not beneficial to any one in the long run.

2. **Remove Redundant Members:** Often teams contain members who have no reason to be there, but are invited simply to satisfy some norm or precedent. The team must contain only those members who are absolutely necessary for the issue to be discussed.

3. **Induce Commitment:** All members of the team must be fully committed to the

task at hand. This can be done in two ways. Firstly by emphasizing the importance of the task and its likely impact on each of the members, and secondly by making each person accountable for his contribution to the meeting. A simple way to do this could be to ask each member in the beginning, the purpose with which he has come to attend the meeting, and at the end to ask each member to share what he got out of it and how he contributed to the group.

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Please Note.: Throughout this article the author has used the male pronoun, to describe various types of behavior in meetings. This does not in any way imply that only men are prone to display those behaviors. Despite this if the reader is still disturbed, the author suggests that she read point no.11.



