Ten interventions for regaining control

of the group

Using active-training techniques tends to minimize the problems that often plague trainers who rely too heavily on lecture and full-group discussion. Nonetheless, difficulties such as monopolizing, distracting, and withdrawal still may occur. Below are interventions you can use; some work well with individual participants while others work with the entire group.

1. **Signal nonverbaIly**. Make eye contact with or move closer to participant when they hold private conversations, start to fall asleep, or hide from participation. Press your fingers together to signal for a wordy participant to finish what he or she is saying. Make a "T" (for time out) sign with your fingers to stop unwanted behavior.
2. **Listen actively.** When participants monopolize discussion, go off on a tangent, or argue with you, interject with a summary of their views and then ask others to speak. Or acknowledge the value of their viewpoints and invite them to discuss their views with you during a break.
3. **Encourage new volunteers**. When a few participants repeatedly speak in class while others hold back, pose a question or problem and then ask how many people have a response to it. You should see new hands go up. Call on one of them. The same technique might work when trying to obtain volunteers for role playing.
4. **Invoke participation rules.**  From time to time, tell participants that you would like to use rules such as the following:
   1. No one may laugh during a role play.
   2. Only participants who have not yet spoken can participate.
   3. Each new comment must build on a previous idea.
   4. Speak for yourself, not for others.
5. **Use good-natured humor**. One way to deflect difficult behavior is to use humor. Be careful, however, not to be sarcastic or patronizing. Gently protest the inappropriate behavior ("Enough, enough for one day!") or humorously put yourself down instead of the participant (“I guess I'm being stubborn, but...").
6. **Connect on a personal level**. Even if the problem participants are hostile or withdrawn, make a point of getting to know them during breaks or lunch. It is unlikely that people will continue to give you a hard time or remain distant if you have taken an interest in them.
7. **Change the method of participation.** Sometimes, you can control the damage done by difficult participant by inserting new formats, such as using pairs or smaIl groups rather than full-class activities.
8. **Ignore mildly negative behaviors**. Try to pay little or no attention to behaviors that are small nuisances. These behaviors may disappear if you simply continue the session.
9. **Discuss very negative behaviors in private**. You must call a stop to behaviors that you find detrimental to the training session. Arrange a break and firmly request, in private, a change in behavior of those participants who are disruptive. Or create small-group activities and call aside the problem participants. If the entire group is involved, stop the session and explain clearly what you need from participants to conduct the training effectively.
10. **Do not take personally the difficulties you encounter.** Remember that many problem behaviors have nothing to do with you. Instead, they are due to personal fears and needs or displaced anger. Try to determine if this is the case and ask whether participants can put aside the conditions affecting their positive involvement in the training session.

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