The OVER-PARTICIPANT:
And furthermore. . .

The Challenge

- Individuals who can't limit their airtime.
- People who provide a level of detail that isn't needed or appropriate to the situation.
- Group members who are oblivious to what others want to hear.
- Individuals who repeat the same information over and over.

What's Really Going On

- Some people have an unrealistic sense of their own importance.
- Some people think by talking.
- Some people highly enjoy talking.
- Over-talking may be a strategy to get attention or gain control.
- Some people are unaware of how often or how long they are talking.
- An individual may feel that the group isn't listening to them or not understanding his/her position

Facilitator Pitfalls

- Not checking with the rest of the group to determine what they need to hear
- Failing to establish guidelines for participation
- Standing by and allowing over-talkers to continue past pre-set time limits.
- Using overly harsh or judgmental language when intervening.
- Coming across

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Intervention Strategies

- Help the group set time limits for each presentation or individual's explanation of their point of view.

- Appoint one of the group members to act as timekeeper and periodically call out milestones.

- Help the group determine what level of detail they need to hear and what specific questions they need answered.

- Ask the group to establish a targeted norm at the start of any meeting where you suspect over-talking might occur: "We have a lot to accomplish today. What commitments do we need to make to honor our timeframes?"

- Keep a group memory that captures the main points shared by each individual. Put the person's name behind his/her comment. This will make visual a pattern of repeating and will help the individual see they have been heard.

- Help over-talkers correct themselves by offering specific feedback: "Out of the last seven viewpoints shared, we have heard from you three times."

- If the over-talker shows no sign of self-control, stop him or hear, summarize what he has said, and check with the rest of the group to see if they need more information from this person at this time

- If none of the above interventions has an impact, take over-talkers aside and give them feedback in a way that encourages them to take responsibility for their actions in future meetings. "Let's take a look at our group memory from today's meeting. You'll notice that you spoke more than anyone else and used more of our discussion time than anyone else. I am concerned that the impact is to keep others from sharing their point of view. I want you to monitor how often you speak at our next meeting and allow others ample opportunity to participate."

TIP: This innocent-seeming problem is actually a major cause of meeting ineffectiveness, so don't ignore it. Be prepared to take action whenever it occurs.

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