

# GROUP LEADER RESOURCES

## Dealing With “That” Group Member

We’ve all had them... *that* member of the group who derails the discussion. As you read through these types, you might recognize someone in your group. Symptoms of the behaviors and approaches to responding are identified. With each type, you may be able to redirect in the group setting. If that doesn’t work, an individual discussion may be required.

### **The Talker** - always comments

*Symptoms:* Regularly inserts their opinion; talks incessantly about anything.

*Approach:* First, resist shouting, “Shut up!” It might accomplish the current need but you may scar them for life. Try to insert yourself to make a comment about what they’ve said and then immediately steer it elsewhere (e.g., “Who else has thoughts on this?” or move on to the next question). Another technique is stating a time limit for a particular question so everyone gets to share - then stick to it. Finally, if their overtalking continues, have a private conversation with them, emphasizing the importance of balancing participation. Work out a signal with them where you will covertly tell them to zip it.

### **The Theologian** - Biblical expert

*Symptoms:* Regularly shares their (irrelevant) Biblical knowledge and quotes verses they know.

*Approach:* While this person may feel like they’re helping the group, their comments may stem from pride. When they share something that pertains to the topic and adds to the conversation, by all means, acknowledge their contribution. However, when they insert Biblical stories or verses that are irrelevant to the study, jump in with, “Okay, let’s hear from others” or share a verse that does pertain. Then pose the question again or another question and call on someone else. As with the Talker, you may need to meet with them individually to appreciate their knowledge but ask them to briefly share theology that directly relates to the lesson.

### **The Wallflower** - barely participates

*Symptoms:* Doesn’t speak up, unless prompted; keeps answers short; might lack confidence.

*Approach:* Spend time getting to know this person. There may be something in their background that makes them uncomfortable speaking up. They may also feel inadequate among other more knowledgeable members of the group. Encourage them privately. If they relate something to you that the group could benefit from, ask them to share it in the next meeting. Also, privately ask other group members to connect with this person and encourage them.

### **The Captain** - takes over

*Symptoms:* Steers the conversation where they want; poses questions; tries to facilitate.

*Approach:* If this frustrates you, first check your humility. Are you upset because they’re taking your role as the leader? Could you potentially have them co-lead with you? Even so, you want to make sure the group is benefitting from the discussion. So if this person is undermining the objective of the meeting, insert yourself and redirect the conversation. Try something like, “That’s a good question but let’s finish this discussion.” Repeated Captain behavior warrants a personal discussion.

### **The Challenger** - questions everything

*Symptoms:* “How do you know that?” “Well, I read that...” (opposing opinion).

*Approach:* This could be a prove-it person who wants to understand the logical path between facts and conclusions. They’re not satisfied with, “... because the Bible says so.” When they pose a question or make a statement, have them examine the root of their comment (e.g., “What makes you ask/say that?”). Or, check with the group - “Does anyone else have that same question?” Or, more generally, “What do you guys think?” If it’s off track, though, redirect with a comment or question.

**The Fixer** - frequently advises

*Symptoms:* Inflicts their help on others. “Have you tried...?” “You should...”

*Approach:* This can be prevented by establishing ground rules with your group (e.g., confidentiality, balanced sharing). This particular ground rule might be, “Only offer advice to yourself (unless asked).” If someone regularly plays advisor or counselor, remind them of the ground rule or have the discussion privately. If a group member specifically asks others for ideas or input on their situation, you can certainly allow that discussion.

Recognize that these types of people are usually acting out of trying to fulfill a need. It’s helpful to understand that need so you can address it. Be patient and gentle, yet direct. They (probably) “know not what they do.”