

Quick Tips for Handling Loose Cannons!

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Individuals who seem attacking can disarm even the most experienced speakers. When statements start with an accusation or an acerbic tone of voice, it is hard to keep your composure, especially if others are witnessing this attack. Difficult individuals need to be contained. The wise speaker remembers some quick tips.

- 1. Never interrupt.** When a difficult person is challenging you, he wants to be heard. Even if you feel that the person has misinformation, refrain from interrupting or correcting. The situation will escalate.
- 2. Demonstrate good listening skills and empathic body language.** Maintain eye contact, nod and make empathetic statements like, “oh” or “that must be upsetting.” Body language that says you are truly listening and are surprised by what you are hearing goes a long way. It is a good idea to paraphrase what you are hearing so that the obnoxious person sees you get it. He or she will correct you if you haven’t gotten all the details straight. Be sure to ask questions about anything that is confusing.
- 3. Don’t take it personally.** It is probably not you. The misbehaving person might always behave in the same annoying manner. He or she may be stressed from too many changes or reorganizations or from a personal crisis. Perhaps, the last person from your company did not follow up or the previously purchased product really didn’t solve their organization’s issues. Try to separate your self from the situation and focus on the best way to respond. Take a few deep breaths or drink some water to gain composure. Do not demonstrate that you are flustered.
- 4. Be courteous. Think before you speak.** Do not argue, defend or put down. You may win the battle but lose the war. A confrontational approach makes the rest of the people at the meeting uncomfortable. It starts to get personal. People who are loose cannons need to be treated with respect, even though they have been unprofessional. Do not make them lose face by arguing or making caustic comments. If you sense that the person is not going to be satisfied by anything you say, offer to take the situation offline so that you have time to explore all of the various problems.
- 5. Do not gloss over.** It is a mistake to gloss over a serious incident in the hopes that no one will notice it or confront you. If you don’t take ownership, people will see you and your organization in a very negative light. If there is a known problem, it is good to acknowledge it right up front and apologize for any inconvenience if it has caused them. Then, focus on what you have done as an organization to correct the problem. By doing so, you demonstrate that you are taking responsibility for a bad situation and that corrective measures are now in place so that this won’t be an issue again.
- 6. Take control of the situation.** As a presenter, it is your responsibility to maintain control of your meeting. People who are “loose cannons” may constantly interrupt you or have a “but” statement for everything you say to gain control from you. If you allow this to continue, you will lose control of the room. After this occurs a second time, use the person’s name and state that you need to finish your statement so that the whole of what you are saying can be understood. For example, you may state, “Hank, please let me finish. The points I am trying to make may help you to better understand the situation.” You can also again suggest taking this offline so that others who do not have this as a concern are not sidetracked. Sometimes, individuals become disruptive by starting “side bar” conversations. A good way to control this is to move in the direction of the conversation. Typically, others who are involved will sense

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that they are being rude and will stop. If this doesn't work, you should stop talking and ask if there is anything you have said that is confusing or needs further discussion.

7. Pay attention to your communication style. People sometimes cause others to behave badly because of their own annoying communication style. No one likes the feeling of being talked down to or being preached at. Also, they do not like the feeling that you do not respect their point of view and that yours is the only correct fix on the situation. Avoid sentences or statements that begin with "you." Avoid pointing. Finally, there is a fine line between arrogance and confidence. The wise speaker knows the difference.

8. Use humor when appropriate. Having a lighter approach with a "loose cannon" can be very disarming. It can also quickly turn a potentially negative situation into something positive.

People who are disruptive are needy. They need to be affirmed and recognized, but often they act in such an inappropriate manner that it is hard to do. The more you understand the reason for their behavior, the better able you will be to detach your self and respond in a non-emotional manner.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.