

What Do You Do with a Group That Just Won't Speak Up?

The Problem:

Everyone fears that group filled with whiners, know it alls, and dominators...BUT what about the group that won't say *anything*. In many ways that's the more dangerous situation since you have no idea where they stand! Are they shy, intimidated, on board with the proposed ideas, not in agreement with the issue at hand, bored, tired, confused??? Or do they just think the facilitator is spouting a bunch of nonsense??? You have NO IDEA!!! How are you going to move the group forward if you can't get them to SPEAK UP??? Ugghhh!!!!

Try these techniques....

- Use the round robin technique (go around the room asking each person to share a comment)
- Call on someone you perceive to be more outgoing and indicate that you'd also like to get input from others next (e.g. "Bob, I believe you had some interesting ideas; please let us know your thoughts... Then, I'd really like to get Cindy and Bill's perspectives")
- Pose a question to the group and just wait at least 5 seconds for a response (usually we're so uncomfortable with silence we refuse to wait more than a few seconds)
- Ask open ended questions (beginning with "What", "Why", and "How")
- Give participants 2 minutes to write down their response/comment on the issue at hand before initiating open group discussion
- Pose a question to the group in the written meeting announcement and ask participants to submit their responses prior to the meeting
- Talk to team members one on one prior to the group session to encourage active participation
- Break the group into pairs or triads and let them discuss an issue in those smaller groups before initiating a large group discussion
- Ask the group why they're so quiet on the subject at hand (you never know what you might not know...when in doubt, ask!)

If you have other tips on this challenge, please email us at tips@meetinggenie.com!

Next Month's Meeting Challenge:

"What do you do when someone is dominating the discussion?"