Four Types of Meeting Participants



It can be tricky dealing with the various personality types, levels of experience, and differing backgrounds of meeting participants. You can't always predict what their reaction will be, and you may not have advance knowledge of who will be in attendance, but you can still prepare. One way is by understanding the four general types of meeting participants you're likely to encounter and how best to interact with them. You may also encounter entire groups that have these characteristics – the response is the same.

The Hostile Participant

Sometimes a meeting participant is just not that into you. They might be openly hostile or downright aggressive. The trick is to deal with their hostility as quickly as possible and get them on your side.

- Establish rules of engagement, keep control of the meeting, and keep it moving along.
- Challenge them if you know they are wrong or have incomplete evidence. Don't humiliate them; illuminate them with the truth or rest of the story.
- Use humor to disarm them, but don't sacrifice or undermine you authority as a speaker.
- Use stories and facts.

The Critic

Critical participants consider themselves intelligent – probably more intelligent than you. They will be skeptical of the information and actively look for ways to disprove what you're saying.

- Present them with cold hard facts. Which means you'll have to do your research and be prepared.
- Don't exaggerate. Use simple and powerful examples to communicate your message.

The Uninformed Participant

Get a read on the level of knowledge, experience, and skill your participants have so you can engage participants across the spectrum.

- Question the audience to find out what they know and don't know.
- Offer some basic facts to help fill in gaps – do this at the beginning and throughout the meeting as needed.

If there is a large gap in knowledge, experience, and skill, for example a meeting with a mix of newly hired and veteran workers, consider breaking the group up into more uniform groups and tailoring information to each group.

Sympathetic Participant

Sympathetic participants are your ally against the hostile and critical. They can also help you win over the cynics and provide help to the uniformed.

- Appeal to what you have in common and how you’re alike to help create and strengthen your bond.
- But be sincere or you’ll lose their sympathy quickly.