

News Column for Use Week of 1/28/19  
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River Valley Extension District  
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## **Dealing with Meeting Disruptors**

We have all been there, attending *that* meeting with the one upper, the clown, the discussion dominator, or the one who always wants to get us off the agenda. Organizations don't have to just tolerate these behaviors. With some planning, we can effectively manage these behaviors.

Starting meetings late has always been a pet peeve of mine. If you always wait on people, guess what, they will always arrive late. Over the years, as an Extension Agent, I was able to "train" my producers to be on time, because they knew if they were five minutes late they were interrupting a presenter. My Board members will tell you, if I am expecting them at a meeting and they are late then be expecting a phone call to see where they are. They know I expect them to be on time and they are!

Setting a base of ground rules is important. Set time limits for each speaker. Agree that nobody speaks twice, until everyone has had a chance to speak – if they want to. Another good ground rule is: no personal comments. We address a behavior, we address an issue, but we do not make derogatory remarks about another person. Some Chairs are very comfortable keeping the meeting on track. If the Chair does not feel comfortable doing that task, then appoint a Parliamentarian to assist in keeping those ground rules. Involve the organization in setting the ground rules, post them in the meeting room, and revisit them as needed.

Sometimes we have a personality who always wants to grab the agenda for themselves, talk about things out of order, or bring up inappropriate topics. Again, the Chair or Parliamentarian may need to make some gentle reminders of the ground rules such as: "I will remind everyone, this is a civic organization, and as such we do not discuss partisan politics," or "We are discussing agenda item 1C at this time, but I will be happy to address that under other new business, or during announcements." By doing this, you keep the meeting on track and on task.

However, sometimes we have a "know it all" or a "dominator," while at the other end of the spectrum, a "zip lip," who never says anything. As the Chair of an organization, it is important to survey the membership, and call on the person who may be too introverted to speak up on their own – asking them to weigh in. The Chairperson may have to remind the "dominator" that we need to hear from all the members. Sometimes, we just have to ignore the "know it all" and call upon someone else.

I once had a Board member who would not speak up during a meeting, but the next day would email me some really great ideas. I finally had to sit down with this person and implore them to speak up during meetings. These "next day" conversations, after a decision had been made, were simply a waste of time for us both. If you tend toward this personality, remind yourself that you do have valuable input for the organization, and it is your responsibility to speak up in a timely fashion.

Finally, we also have the "because we have always done it that way," the "that will never work here," and the "we tried that once and it failed" organization members. For these folks, we need to respond with questions like: "then how could we do it better," or "so how do we tweak this idea so it will work," or statements like "but, these are the things that have changed in the community since then, and we owe it to ourselves to take another look."

With a few simple ideas, we can have a more organized and a more effective organization. For more great ideas on organizational leadership, join us for the Board Leadership Series to be offered on the four Tuesdays in February in Washington.

To register or for more information, please contact John Forshee by calling the River Valley District, Washington Office at 785-325-2121, emailing [jforshee@ksu.edu](mailto:jforshee@ksu.edu), or texting/calling 785-447-1291.

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