

Group Member Roles

Often members take on certain roles (sometimes consciously and sometimes without really knowing they are doing it). People will take on different roles at different stages of your group. Listed below are some supportive and destructive group roles to be aware of.

Supportive Roles:

1. Information seeker: asks other members to tell more of their story.
2. Opinion seeker: takes an active interest in what others in the group think.
3. Initiator: offers new ideas, new ways of doing things. Often sets the pace in a discussion.
4. Elaborator: wants more than just the facts in a story. Adds "color" to the discussion.
5. Tension-reliever: often uses gentle humor to relieve tense situations. Uses "identification" to keep the tense person from feeling alone.
6. Reviewer: tends to provide summary statements and clarity statements.
7. Consensus seeker: looks to see what the group is thinking and whether or not there is agreement on issues or decisions.
8. Encourager: finds ways to build up others in the group.
9. Standard-bearer: holds forth the values of the group and defends them.

Destructive Roles:

1. Aggressor: insults and criticizes others. May show strong jealousy.
2. Rabbit chaser: consistently focuses on stories or issues irrelevant to the topic at hand.
3. Recognition seeker: tends to focus primarily on his or her own achievements or successes.
4. Dominator: Monopolizes group interaction. Tries to control discussion.
5. Special interest pleader: tends to focus on a personal pet peeve regardless of direction of discussion.
6. Negativist: might be a perfectionist who is never satisfied with anything.
7. Quibbler: focuses on details. Often loses the forest for the sake of the trees.
8. Practical joker: rather than using humor positively tends to distract people with jokes and comments. This is often a defense mechanism and is used whenever a discussion gets to personal.

Your job as small group leader is not to "peg" each person. You simply need to be aware that these kinds of roles exist in a group. Listen to each person with a sensitive spirit and heart. Ask probing questions that help get behind each role. If you have problems working with any one particular type of person in your group, consult your ministry staff for ways to solve the problem and deal with the relationship.

* Source: Leading Life-Changing Small Groups, by Donahue