

Taming the Over-Talkative

The following are some suggestions for dealing with overly talkative small group members (in increasing order of severity or risk).

1. Make sure it is not you that is being over-talkative.
2. Reiterate the agreed upon ground rules, like "Remember we're here to listen to one another" or "Try to reverse your normal pattern and talk less/more for the sake of discussion."
3. Use careful question directions such as "I want two people who have not said anything yet to respond", or "I want everyone to answer this question."
4. Use a stopwatch (literally) to set time limits on answers (no one will mind for everyone will be in the same boat).
5. Sit right beside the talkative, reducing the eye contact that cues contributions.
6. Interrupt the person in the middle of a long speech and say, "You've made several points – let's see if there is any response to what you have said up to this point."
7. Stop looking at the person while he or she is talking – it usually will slow the person down, again because eye cues cease.
8. Expect a mature group to do the work for you, with members humorously and gently reminding the talkative person that he or she is "doing it again." When trust has been built, such communication is possible.
9. Ask the person privately to help draw quieter folks out. (This is a favorite suggestion in the textbooks, but it is dangerous because most talkative people are not dumb – they will know what you are up to – and besides, quieter folks do not always like being drawn out.)
10. Ask the person privately or publicly to "shut up" (in many ways, the private approach is more risky). Choose your presentation wisely.

Some of these suggestions may appear to include impolite behavior. But the point is that often interrupting a member is worth it if the health of the group is at stake.

* Resource: Seven Myths About Small Groups by Dan Williams. IVP, 1991