

# Managing your Meeting Mortals

Sarah Simpson



SARAH SIMPSON

---

# MANAGING YOUR MEETING MORTALS

Managing your Meeting Mortals

1<sup>st</sup> edition

© 2018 Sarah Simpson & [bookboon.com](http://bookboon.com)

ISBN 978-87-403-2632-1

# CONTENTS

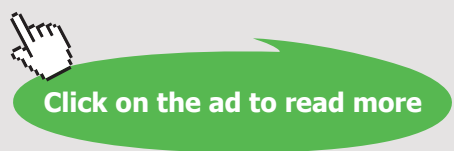
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The 'can't be quiet'</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The diverter</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The deflator</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The coin flipper</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The distractor</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>The combative</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The 'nice of you to join us'</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>The 'look at me'</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>The whisperer</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>The quiet one</b>	<b>19</b>

www.sylvania.com

**We do not reinvent the wheel we reinvent light.**

Fascinating lighting offers an infinite spectrum of possibilities: Innovative technologies and new markets provide both opportunities and challenges. An environment in which your expertise is in high demand. Enjoy the supportive working atmosphere within our global group and benefit from international career paths. Implement sustainable ideas in close cooperation with other specialists and contribute to influencing our future. Come and join us in reinventing light every day.

Light is OSRAM **OSRAM SYLVANIA**



<b>12</b>	<b>The free lunch</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>The picker</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>The rose tinted glasses</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>The joker</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>The fiddler</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>27</b>
18.1	Fogging technique	27
18.2	The difficult conversation formula	28

Life is about the people you meet and the things you  
create with them, so go out and start creating!

– Unknown

# 1 INTRODUCTION

A lot has been written on holding effective meetings in terms of; proper agenda, effective chairing, correct location, electronic alternatives etc. But, I've always been fascinated by the personalities and private agendas of those who actually turn up to meetings, and how you can actively deal with them. Being able to more efficiently recognise and manage these characters will result in more focused and beneficial meetings, which has to be a good thing, right?

According to the Harvard Business Review, in July 2017, “the meeting madness needs to stop”. Of the senior managers they surveyed:

- 65% said meetings stopped them from completing their work
- 71% said meetings were inefficient and unproductive
- 64% believed meetings came at the expense of deep thinking
- 62% think that meetings miss opportunities for the team to become closer

In general you will find yourself going to 6 types of meetings:

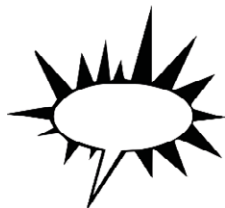
- Team building
- Status updates
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Innovation
- Information sharing

So, if we are going to have these meetings, let's ensure we can actively manage those who attend, for the benefit of all. The 15 meeting characters we will be looking at are:

1. The 'can't be quiet'
2. The diverter
3. The deflator
4. The coin flipper
5. The distractor
6. The combative
7. The 'nice of you to join us'
8. The 'look at me
9. The whisperer
10. The 'quiet one'
11. The ' free luncher'
12. The picker
13. The rose tinted glasses
14. The joker
15. The fiddler



## 2 THE 'CAN'T BE QUIET'



Some people talk too much and say way too little

– Unknown

How to spot them:

- They don't actually contribute anything of value
- They appear to love the sound of their own voice
- They interrupt others

How to manage them:

- “Can you tell us how this conversation relates to the issue at hand”
- “Can you summarise the point you are making!”
- Stay focused on the agenda
- Thank them for their contribution, but then name someone else to take over. “Thanks for that Kate, Beth what are your ideas?”
- Avoid body language which encourages them to keep going. For example smiling and nodding
- Orientate your body away from them and towards the next person to speak
- If they interrupt you or others, remind them you (or others) are speaking and ask to finish your point

### 3 THE DIVERTER



There's nothing anyone can do except change the subject

– Philibert Orry

How to spot them:

- They are masters at turning attention away from the main issues
- They bring up less important or relevant ideas and topics
- They hijack conversations and take topics off at a tangent
- They have an obvious personal agenda and topics they want discussing

How to manage them:

- Ensure you have a clear and specific agenda
- Consider asking them only concise and specific questions, which can limit the chance of them 'going off topic'
- Main items, who is leading and appropriate timescales should be stated and given to attendee prior
- Consider having a 'park sheet'. A way of recording 'off topic' conversations that may be returned to if there is time, or they may be taken up outside the main meeting
- Consider phrases such as:
  - "Can we confine ourselves to the agenda topic"
  - "We need to avoid going off on a tangent"

## 4 THE DEFLATOR



A cynic can chill and dishearten with a single word

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

How to spot them:

- They drain enthusiasm and creativity out of the room
- Some places I have worked call these people ‘oxygen thieves’!
- They use negative body language when people are talking. For example, shaking their head and rolling their eyes
- They like to say
  - “it cannot be done”
  - “I’m telling you it won’t work”
  - “It’s never worked before, what makes you think it will this time”?
  - “they’ll never go for it”
  - “just say no”

How to manage them

- Ensure you always display positive, upbeat behaviours, language, tone and pitch
- Ask if they could argue for the opposite point of view. Set them a challenge!
- Deploy tactics to allow people to see things from other points of view. For example De Bono’s 6 hats

## 5 THE COIN FLIPPER



There are two sides to every story. If you aren't willing or able to listen to both sides, don't be so quick to make judgements on what you haven't heard

– Unknown

How to spot them:

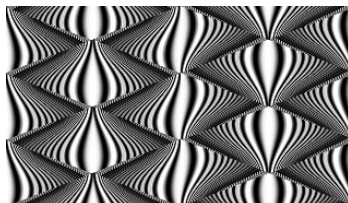
- The mission of these people is to ALWAYS take the opposite view point
- They take delight in seeing the other side of the coin, but seldom offer up an alternative
- They can side track meetings
- Are often argumentative
- You will hear them saying things such as:
  - “Let's say for the sake of argument”
  - “I think you will find that the opposite is true”

Their constant ‘putting down’ of the ideas of others, can rapidly lead to demotivation. Speaking negatively before an idea is formed is a sure-fire way to kill innovation and creativity

How to manage them:

- Clearly you don't want to shut down all opposing views, but these people make a sport out of it
- Encourage everyone's contributions, so they are ‘diluted’
- Try saying *“thank you for that different perspective, however, if we look at the facts as they are currently”*.
- Stick to the agenda timings

## 6 THE DISTRACTOR



You can't do the big things if you're distracted by small things

– Unknown

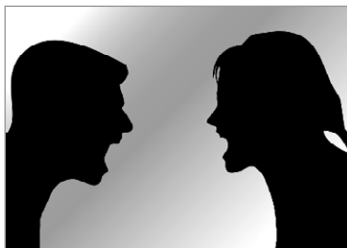
How to spot them:

- They are not fully committed to the meeting
- Their time appears to be more valuable than anyone else's. Sighing may accompany their actions
- They are multi-tasking; using phones and laptops
- Their actions distract others and take focus away from the meeting at hand
- Their distractions may not even be work related. They may be on social media or texting others at the meeting saying how they can't wait to get home, or making inappropriate meme at the expense of others

How to manage them:

- Set ground rules re: device use. I always find it is better to let those attending set the rules as this means they are more likely to abide by them and the group is more likely to 'self-police' this, rather than you having to step in
- Remind people at the start of the meeting to turn off devices (unless it is critical phones etc. are on). If you are presenting, consider having a slide with this on at the beginning
- If it is a long meeting, let people know when breaks will be and when it will end. Although this should be on the circulated agenda
- Ask them a direct question..... and wait..... until they realise that you and the rest of the group are looking at them and waiting for a response
- Take the time to find out and use everyone's name. this ensures they don't feel anonymous, surplus to requirements or 'making up the numbers'
- Find out if they are struggling with workloads
- Do not be tempted to confiscate their phone (we are not at school now), or shut their laptop on their hand!

## 7 THE COMBATIVE



I'm not arguing. I'm explaining why I am right

– Unknown

How to spot them:

- May appear to be permanently angry and upset
- They are sometimes referred to as 'the ones who can have an argument in an empty lift'
- They create a heated and often uncomfortable atmosphere
- They want to argue for arguments sake, as opposed to contributing and moving the discussions and meeting forward

How to manage them:

- Circulate the agenda beforehand and ask for everyone to bring ideas to contribute. This will allow them to actively contribute in a more positive, proactive way
- Don't respond to their emotion
- Respond to the content of their argument and ensure they feel listened to. "So, if I understand you, what you are saying is...?"
- Ask them for solutions, not problems. "Thank you for describing that problem for us. How would you suggest it could be resolved?"

## 8 THE 'NICE OF YOU TO JOIN US'



Arriving late is a way of saying that your own time is more valuable than the time of the person who waited for you

– Karen Joy Fowler



Discover the truth at [www.deloitte.ca/careers](http://www.deloitte.ca/careers)

**Deloitte.**

© Deloitte & Touche LLP and affiliated entities.



How to spot them:

- Quite simply, they will be the ones arriving late and be wanting for someone to give them a summary of what the people who were on time have done
- Some run in all of a dither because they are so busy, or want to look that way. Others saunter in as if they're not even late
- They'll be the one responsible for meetings running over, if the chairperson decides to wait for them

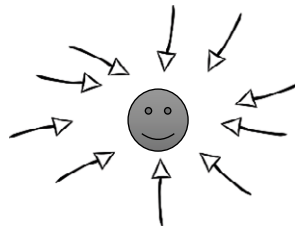
Remember, "Sorry I'm 5 minutes late", means that if there are 10 people in the room, they have wasted 50 minutes of everyone's time

How to manage them:

- Remind people when circulating the agenda that you will start on time
- Set punctuality as part of the meeting ground rules
- Do not recap what they have missed, as this will infuriate those that were there on time and will have an adverse effect on your timing
- Give persistent offenders their items, or a role at the beginning of the meeting. Once they start missing their agenda items their lateness often improves
- Ask them in private, at the end of the meeting, why they were late. This challenge is perfectly acceptable and will allow you to determine:
  - Legitimate excuses
  - Prioritisation issues
  - Lack of concern and respect for the meeting and those attending it



## 9 THE 'LOOK AT ME'



I love being the centre of attention. I'm shameless about it

– Brendon Urie

How to spot them:

- They like being the centre of attention
- They talk way more than they listen
- They may know a lot about the subject being discussed
- They stop new ideas being discussed and developed
- They say:
  - “let’s do it this way”
  - “I know more about this than anyone else, I so I know what will work”
- They can be intimidating to other staff and people may be concerned about stating their point of view, or going against the way they see things
- They can be very dismissive and not listen to the opinions of others
- They believe everyone is grateful for their insight
- They believe their views are more important than anyone else’s

How to manage them:

- Acknowledge and thank them for their suggestions and then open it up to others
- When they take a breath say “thank you “, and move on. Or, I appreciate your perspective Kate, but I’m sure you’ll agree that it’s important we hear from everyone”
- Send out the agenda before the meeting, or have a copy ready
- Sit next to them, so eye contact is limited
- Ask how their point is related to the subject under discussion

# 10 THE WHISPERER



I usually don't what other people are saying until they start whispering

– Unknown

How to spot them:

- They keep talking after the rest of the group has stopped, or have moved on
- They start side-conversations which are whispered in order that others can't hear
- People they are talking to may appear embarrassed, or may join in, further disrupting the meeting

How to manage them:

- Highlight their whispering:
  - “Do you have anything to add”?
  - “Could you share your thoughts with the rest of the group”?
- Make eye contact and don't announce and go onto the next item until they are quiet

# 11 THE QUIET ONE



Shhh

Talk too much and they think you're a fool. Be silent and they become curious

– Scottie Waves

How to spot them:

- They contribute little or no ideas
- They sit back and let others do all the talking
- They don't volunteer for anything
- They may have concerns around; public speaking, or a fear of being 'wrong' or judged

How to manage them:

- Use a 'round-robin' approach, in which everyone is asked for their contributions in turn
- Assign specific role and / or agenda items
- Ask open ended questions which require greater dialogue
- Use the person's name
- If you do want their contribution, let them know before hand, so they can prepare and are not caught 'off guard'
- Find out their areas of expertise and gently find a way to include this valued knowledge
- Give them prep and thinking time
- Consider (if appropriate and feasible), having smaller 'break out' meetings
- Sit opposite them in order that your body language is supportive and eye contact is easier
- Can they join in in other ways? For example recording the thoughts of others.

Remember, quiet **does not** = uncaring, detached, untalented, soft, weak or a 'push-over'

# 12 THE FREE LUNCH



There is no such thing as a free lunch

– Milton Friedman

How to spot them:

- They turn up and make a bee-line for the lunch and coffee
- They often have to leave early (after food)
- If food is provided part way through, then that is when they will arrive
- Their actual contribution, other than to the washing up, is usually limited

How to manage them:

- Set an agenda in which all attendees have some kind of contribution
- If food is provided at the start, then give the ‘free lunchers’ an agenda item at the end, and vice-versa

# 13 THE PICKER



Those who spend their time looking for the faults in others  
usually make no time to correct their own

– Art Jonak

How to spot them:

- They don't contribute, other than to find fault in other approaches or suggestions
- They don't problem solve
- They can reduce the energy in the room
- They tend not to take on any work themselves, but talk about other people's efforts
- If they don't verbally dismiss others, they may use negative body language; tutting, eye rolling, or shaking of the head
- People are reducing their interactions with them, for fear of having their approaches or actions criticised

How to manage them:

- Consider employing a diffusing 'fogging technique' (see appendix) <https://bookboon.com/en/having-difficult-conversations-ebook>
- Give them a specific action to complete, which requires providing the group with an update
- In private, you could consider pointing their behaviour out. Is it a habit which they are oblivious to? Do they receive regular feedback, both in terms of reinforcing positive behaviours, and redirecting negative ones?

# 14 THE ROSE TINTED GLASSES



Rose coloured glasses are never made in bifocals. Nobody wants to read the small print

– Ann Landers

How to spot them:

- They are the positive and overly optimistic ones
- They may clash with the pessimists
- Their positivity may fail to take account of actual reality
- People may tire of hearing phrases such as:
  - “In an ideal world”
  - “Yes, but if that wasn’t the case”
  - “If we could, just for one minute pretend that....”

How to manage them:

- You need to harness their optimism, without completely crushing them, by brutally pointing out all the harsh realities of life! They essentially need less ‘magical thinking’ and more just ‘positive thinking’
- Encourage them to have multiple options and outlooks. For example undertaking something with risks, no matter how small, should have a ‘what if’ element.
- Encourage balanced ‘real world’ thinking

A 2014 article in the NY Times, claimed research showed positive thinking fools us into believing we have already reached our goal, resulting in a reduction in perusing it. Adding in ‘realism’, in which goals are visualised along with potential obstacles, provided more energy and better results

(The problem with positive thinking, NY Time, October 26, 2014, page SR9)

# 15 THE JOKER



I never stopped joking around long enough to realise you weren't laughing anymore

– Alexandra potter

How to spot them:

- They are the clown of the group
- They interrupt others with irrelevant 'jokes' and 'one liners'
- They think everything and anything is there to be turned into a joke
- They may offend or upset people, especially if there are a mix of people from different cultures
- They may start off being funny, but then people become embarrassed or uncomfortable
- They diminish the contributions of others

How to manage them

- They crave attention and therefore you need to remove this
- Don't use body language which could be construed as encouraging; smiling and nodding of the head
- Don't give verbal cues for them to keep going, such as "hmm", "yes", or "ha"
- Ask them outright to save their jokes until the meeting end, or the break
- Ensure they know (in private) that they don't need to clown around in order to be liked. Let them know their conduct is distracting / unprofessional. The 'difficult conversation formula' can work here (see app 2) <https://bookboon.com/en/having-difficult-conversations-ebook>

# 16 THE FIDDLER



Stop being distracted by things that have nothing to do with your goals

– Unknown

How to spot them:

- They can't sit still
- They will be the one doodling, or even worse clicking a pen on and off!
- They can be distracting to others

How to manage them:

- Remember they may have a genuine concentration issue
- Provide quiet, non-distracting 'toys' on the table for everyone, for example foam stress balls
- Ask them a direct question if their fiddling is obviously distracting others
- Give them a specific role, which encourages meeting-long concentration. For example recording discussions on a flip chart
- If they are creative consider letting them take visual notes (<https://bookboon.com/en/visual-notetaking-ebook>)



# 17 SUMMARY


This book has focused on meeting characters, as opposed to the practical skills of setting and running a meeting. Namely; selecting participants, developing agenda, time management, evaluating effectiveness etc.

The 15 types of attendees we have looked at are:


1. The 'can't be quiet'
2. The diverter
3. The deflator
4. The coin flipper
5. The distractor
6. The combative
7. The 'nice of you to join us'
8. The 'look at me'
9. The whisperer
10. The 'quiet one'
11. The 'free luncher'

SIMPLY CLEVER

ŠKODA



**We will turn your CV into an opportunity of a lifetime**



Do you like cars? Would you like to be a part of a successful brand? We will appreciate and reward both your enthusiasm and talent. Send us your CV. You will be surprised where it can take you.

Send us your CV on  
[www.employerforlife.com](http://www.employerforlife.com)



12. The picker
13. The rose tinted glasses
14. The joker
15. The fiddler

You will now be able to see that they can all be efficiently and effectively managed. The result will be:

- Achievement of the meetings objectives
- Running to time
- Minimising of frustrations
- Ensuring attendees feel that something has been achieved and their time has been well spent

# 18 APPENDIX

## 18.1 FOGGING TECHNIQUE

The reason I like this technique and why I use it, when dealing with aggression is:

- The concept is straightforward
- It's relatively easy to learn
- It makes sense
- I've taught it to many people, including those on conflict management workshops and it is always well received
- It works!

### **Fogging – why does it work?**

The fogging technique works for the following reasons:

- Aggressive people are often expecting disagreement
- This approach slows them down
- It provides an expected response ...."yes"
- You state you can see what they seem to think or feel
- You do not state what you think or feel
- This approach can reduce explosive situations and tension

### **Fogging examples**

#### *Scenario*

Someone says to you;

*"I think that the way you did that was really stupid"*

This is quite clearly aggressive and they are most likely expecting an aggressive, or even submissive response, which starts with a denial, and more often than not, the word "no"

But, if we have a look at 6.2 above, you will see that the power in the technique comes from starting your response with the word “yes”. In addition you do not lose your self-credibility, as you are not denying your point of view, you are merely slowing their aggression down.

**Non-fogging** response examples might include;

“No it wasn’t, you’re stupid”

“No it wasn’t, it worked perfectly”

**Fogging** examples might include;

“Yes, I can see that you think it was stupid”

“Yes, this is the way I always respond to this situation”

## 18.2 THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION FORMULA

When having a difficult conversation, you can sometimes become side tracked away from the desired result. This is where a ‘formula’ or ‘step by step’ approach can help.

- 1) When you .....,it ..... (this must be ‘real and observable’)
- 2) What I need is for you to .....
- 3) The benefits to you would be.....
- 4) The benefits to me would be.....
- 5) The benefits to the wider team / group / client, would be.....
- 6) What do you think about that? Be prepared for potential comments or justifications
- 7) So what is your plan to..... (ensure they can do what you need them to do to fulfil step 2)
- 8) We will review this in.....

**Please do not;** start the conversation with an apology, or tell them that someone else has asked you to speak to them. It is essential that you OWN THE CONVERSATION.

### The assertiveness formula in practice – an example

Below is an example of this formula in practice, using the scenario of lateness, which we saw in chapter 2.1, was one of the top 5 difficult conversation categories faced by managers.

1. **When you** come in late, it sets a bad example, people have to wait and colleagues are becoming increasingly frustrated.
2. **What I need is** for you to come in on time.
3. **The benefits to you** would be; your colleagues not having to cover for you and / or get frustrated, work schedules can be maintained
4. **The benefits to me** would be knowing who is in and when, not having to deal with colleagues' frustration and client complaints
5. (covered in 4 above)
6. **What do you think** about that? (you may get responses such as, “yes but”, or, “I can't because”)
7. So, **what is your plan** to get in on time?
8. **We will review** this in x timeframe (this will be dependent upon the previous conversation)

See 'Having Difficult Conversations' for a more detailed look at this and other approaches <https://bookboon.com/en/having-difficult-conversations-ebook>