

Irrational Type

The board meeting of the Peacock Valley School had come to the public forum section of the agenda, but before the president could call for the first speaker, a man in the back of the room moved forward rapidly, yelling, "How can you even think of allowing sex education in our schools? Schools are for academic pursuits! You have no right teaching my child about sex! I won't allow you to teach sex in the schools."

The president pounded her gavel and interjected, "Excuse me, but we spent several months looking at all aspects of sex education. We had a parent/teacher committee that met regularly. . . ."

The man cut her off, his voice rising, "I don't want sex education in our schools. Sex education shouldn't be in schools. I don't want it! I don't want it!!"

With the irrational type, the problem is not the content of the issue but the inability of the person to hear anyone else. This type is impervious to communication.

The Recognition Seeker

The management team of the Personnel Division had been meeting for about half an hour when Joe Starlet burst into the room!

“Sorry I’m late again, the traffic was lousy, and just as I went to pull into a place in the parking lot, someone beat me to it! What have I missed?”

The team leader asked Joe to sit down and take a few minutes to get caught up.

Moving noisily to his chair, Joe dropped his notes as he spoke up. “But I need to know what you’ve discussed. I have ideas about many of the items on the agenda, so if someone would just do a recap for me, I’d appreciate it.”

Arriving late happens to all of us at some time, but for a few people, this is a life pattern representing not the lateness itself but a need for attention and notice. Late arrival is but one manifestation. Other examples include the professional resister and the organizational cynic, both of whom have unconditionally negative responses to change.

The Bully

Mr. Smith came barging into the office of Ms. Sweet, the school principal. "I want my child taken out of Mrs. Moore's class immediately!" he shouted as he leaned over the desk. "That teacher is not right for my son! I want you to change him today, before I leave your office!"

Ms. Sweet responded, "Mr. Smith, your son is placed where he belongs."

"Are you telling me I don't know what is good for my son? I don't care what you say! If you don't change him, I'm calling the superintendent. Then we'll see what happens!"

The bully loves confrontation. He wins by intimidation and focuses on the battle at hand.

He has little long-range perspective.

Space Cadet

Mrs. Adams had made an appointment with the principal to discuss her first-grade daughter's class placement. Mrs. Adams began the conference by saying sweetly, although she was obviously disturbed, "I really want my child changed to Mrs. David's class because she does marshmallow art with her class and my little Sally didn't get to do that with her teacher, Mrs. Zeal. All of Sally's friends got to do the marshmallow art but she didn't."

The principal tried to calm her, "But Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Zeal is a mentor teacher. She offers the students many wonderful art experiences, computer activities, and many other interesting lessons."

Breathlessly Mrs. Adams went on, "But she doesn't do marshmallow art. Sally wants to have some marshmallow art hanging on the refrigerator just like her friend Mary. Sally is so upset and the marshmallow art is so creative and fun for the kids."

While this scenario may seem implausible, it is a true incident! The space cadet is in a different world. Whatever you say fails to touch his or her reality.

Hidden-Agenda Type

Two colleagues, Steve and David, had been working diligently on researching and preparing a joint project presentation for the president of Savor Insurance Company. Today they were meeting to complete their plans and develop the presentation. Unbeknown to Steve, David was up for possible promotion, and this presentation would have a big impact on the decision.

Steve arrived with completed presentation boards, overhead transparencies, and notes in hand. David entered and was taken aback at seeing everything already in finished form.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Steve beaming.

David replied tentatively, "Fine, the presentation boards look fine. But I don't like the transparencies."

Steve asked incredulously, "What's the matter with the transparencies? They depict everything we've researched."

David replied, "I think they could be different, more self-explanatory. Maybe they need a little more color. Yeah, I think I have some ideas on how they could be changed for the better."

Once again, all of us will have hidden agendas at times, but some people repeatedly hide their intents and needs. Very often they embroil us in fights over the secret, not the real, agenda.

Oblivious Type

Pam is out on the golf course ready to tee off when Frank approaches, talking as he comes. "You've got a great swing. Did you take lessons or is it natural?"

Pam turns around and gives him "the look" to caution him to be quiet and prepares once again to tee off

"Oh, sorry, go ahead and hit the ball," Frank apologizes.

Once again Pam goes into her swing . . .

"I wish I had a natural swing. Try as I might I feel so clumsy!" babbles Frank as he paces a yard away.

"Do you mind?" asks Pam.

"Oh, there I go again," he sighs apologetically once more. "Don't mind me—go ahead and hit. It is your turn, after all."

Pam gets in a practice swing to put her mind back in the game. Just as she steps up to swing again. . .

"Great swing, do you think you can teach me how to do that?"

The oblivious type is impervious to feedback. These people do not mean harm, but they repeatedly violate the needs of others. They simply do not realize what they are doing.

Whiner

The director has been waiting expectantly for the project report Jan Jones is to deliver today. Suddenly, Jan arrives sans report.

"Where is the report?" asks the director.

"I couldn't get the report finished," she says. "I didn't have enough time. Can you give me more time? I know I can get it finished if you just give me two more weeks," she begs.

"But you've had a month," replies the director.

"I know, but I've had so much to do and two other projects had to be finished during the same time," she complains with a whine.

"Didn't you accept this time frame when you were given the project?" the director asks rationally.

Jan pleads, "But I didn't know how hard it would be or how much time it would take. Pleeceassse, give me more time. Pleeceassse!"

The whiner wears you down through tone. A whiner plays the victim and refuses to accept responsibility for anything.

High-Ground Fighter

The City Council of Middletown was meeting to determine an amount to offer Mr. Yomagura for a strip of his strawberry field that the city wanted to annex. Mr. Yomagura rose to speak.

"You want to take my land away from me without my permission," he said solemnly.

"Mr. Yomagura," the mayor pro tem began, "We do not want to take away your land. We are offering you full market value for the strip we want."

"They took my father's land, too, and sent him to live in a camp during the war. Now you want to take my land as well."

"Mr. Yomagura," the mayor pro tem tried to reason, "We want to pay you for your land."

"I wanted this land to hand down to my son," Mr. Yomagura went on painfully. "Now you are taking it away from me. What will I tell my son when he asks what happened to our land?"

The high-ground fighter fights from a morally or publicly superior position. These contenders have sympathy and public relations on their side.

Wonderfully Nice Person

Principal Maria Garcia wasn't sure what occasion had led to the box of candy on her desk from Mrs. Kim Woods, a second-grade teacher. Later in the day Kim approached her.

"Did you get the candy?" she questioned without waiting for a reply. "You are such a great principal and I appreciate everything you do for me."

Slightly embarrassed, Maria responded, "Thank you, Kim, I appreciate your thinking of me."

Kim continued sweetly, "You always encourage us to try new things, and we all think that is so wonderful. Well, I would like to have some extra funds to buy some animals for my classroom."

"I'm sorry," the principal interrupted. "I have no money for animals for your classroom. The budget has all been spent."

Kim persisted: "The last time I came for extra supplies you were so gracious and found the money. You are such a super principal. I love working for you. I wouldn't want to work with anyone else after working for you. Please, can I have just a little money for the kids?"

When we think of difficult people, we think of nasty types. The wonderfully nice person can also be difficult. These people overpower you with their niceness—and your guilt. You say "yes"—and hate yourself later. You say "no"—and hate yourself immediately.

The Sniper (aka Parking-Lot Contender)

The manager of the service department called in Sam Weston, a service employee known for his grumbling.

“So, Sam, I hear you are unhappy about the decision we all made at the last meeting to work a four-day week,” said the manager.

“Who says I’m unhappy?” Sam shot back.

“That’s not the point, Sam. The point is that we all agreed to try a four-day week. Now I hear that you are not supporting the decision we all agreed to.”

“I want to know the names of the people who say I’m not supportive. Who are they? What did they say?” Sam asked belligerently.

“That’s not the point, Sam. Did you try to undercut our decision?”

“No, not me!”

Snipers like to hide behind rocks and trees and cars. They will not confront you to your face, only behind your back. They also seem quite comfortable lying to you.

The Know-It-All

Kevin Barnes had been assigned the task of purchasing new furniture for the offices and waiting rooms at Center City Hospital. He had worked diligently on the task for several months, locating the best commercial furniture at the best price. The purchase list was finally ready to take to the Board of Directors for approval, and Kevin was confident of his selections. The day of the board meeting arrived. The directors had been given the list prior to the meeting.

"Mr. Barnes," began Mrs. Coulten, "I see you have put together quite an extensive list for us to approve."

"Yes," replied Mr. Barnes with pride. "I spent a great deal of time researching and comparing before compiling the list."

"Well, what I don't understand then, Mr. Barnes, is how you could even suggest that we pay these prices for tables and chairs! I have been doing some shopping of late myself for my home and I can get much better prices than the ones you have quoted here. Furthermore, I don't think we need to have this fancy fabric. Why, in my house, plain is good enough for my family. I think I could have found much better prices."

Mr. Barnes started to respond, "Mrs. Coulten, I appreciate your comments, but I really did look into each and every item . . ."

He got no further as Mrs. Coulten continued. "Mr. Barnes, I will be glad to give you a list of the places I have been shopping and you will see I can get much better prices."

The know-it-all knows everything about everything. These difficult people have read, seen, tried, and experienced it all. They *are* superior, if we can judge from their tone and attitude.

Passive Resister

The staff of Westmont Middle School had been involved in a heated discussion on the direction of after-school activities. Some members were anxious to move away from competition and toward activities that would include all students. Cindy Steward had been lounging in the back of the room, not participating in the discussion. Finally, someone suggested that a trial run was possible. They were trying to reach consensus on opening up all activities to all interested students for one semester to see how it would go over.

The facilitator asked Cindy how she felt.

"Go ahead and do whatever you want to do. You always do anyway," Cindy replied disinterestedly.

"But Cindy, we really want to know how you feel," urged the facilitator.

"Do whatever you want; you never listen to me anyway!" Cindy insisted.

The passive resister does not like to be direct but likes to control through guilt and last-minute comments. Passive resisters share indirection with the sniper. They control best in group settings.

The Indecisive

The superintendent of Eagle School District, Dr. John Lathrop, was engaged in discussion with a member of the school board, Mr. Biff Brown. The school board would shortly be deciding budget cuts to make for the next year.

Dr. Lathrop began by sharing the many recommendations developed by staff. "We have academic, athletic, extracurricular, transportation, and maintenance programs to review, as you can see from this long list. Which of these programs would you favor cutting?"

Mr. Brown responded, confused, "I don't know. What do the others think?"

"I think it is going to be important for each of you to decide and then work collectively," the superintendent answered.

"I need more data. Can you get me more information on each of these?"

Exasperated, the superintendent replied, "We've given you all the data over the last three months."

In a clearly indecisive tone, Mr. Brown said, "Oh, that's right. Which one do you favor? And maybe we need more time before deciding."

Indecisives never seem to reach a decision. More data, more time, more options—these are the constant complaints. Put under pressure, indecisives want someone else to choose for them.