

enjoy complaining and grouching about things from time to time, persecuted behavior stems from a non-stop, perennial point of view. And since the victim perspective predominates, it's easy for your group to join the list of persecutors.

Polarity Response is a behavior unfamiliar in name but not in most everyone's experience. Whatever the issue or opinion, the polarity responder takes the opposite view. Disagreement is automatic. This can include and goes past the devil's advocate role some people take on in groups. Most polarity responders seem unaware of their behavior and its impact on others.

What can you do? While you were reading the descriptions above you were probably thinking of specific examples from your own experience, and that may have left you wondering what you can do to stay focused and flexible in the face of such behavior. That's not surprising. A change of focus is in order. Here are five things you can do

1. Notice your response. Is the behavior one that really "pushes your buttons"? Your first step is to consider what's going on with you in this unpleasant situation. Be responsible for your own reactions -- after all, that's one of the things you wish that difficult person would do.
2. Change what you're doing. Since you can't really change someone else, change what you can. The results can be surprising and rewarding. First of all, it shifts you from being at the mercy of the situation. As soon as you begin to consider exercising new options, you step out of the problem frame and onto a larger canvas. This re-framing is an important shift in perspective.
3. Ask the person "What do you want?" You may think you know but you may learn a few things you didn't know by asking. Of course, it's hard to ask the question after things have spiraled out of control. Hopefully you can find a good time to ask, because it's the ideal starting point for building rapport and trust.
4. Focus on outcomes. Your group needs to ask itself the "What do you want?" question. Spend whatever time it takes to generate a set of goals and objectives as well as how to meet them. Now comes the really important part of this formula (in bold italics): *Once you have specified your outcomes, decide what behaviors will support getting them like: Patience. Assuming Positive Intent. Willingness to Listen.* Generate your list of behaviors during meetings in a conspicuous place. This will be a great reminder for even the positive contributors in the group. And when the negative behaviors erupt, you can point to the list, not at the person. Stay focused on what you want. If the difficult person is unwilling to change behavior, you will also need to specify how the group will respond.
5. Consider alternatives. What will you do if the difficult behavior persists? One option could be to take a five minute break. (This is sort of like pushing the group re-set button). During the break, clarify for the difficult person what the goals for the meeting are and which behaviors support those goals. Then state what the next step will be if the difficulties arise again. Be prepared to quickly adjourn your meeting if the behaviors continue. For the extreme behaviors, it may be the only useful choice. Consistently applied, it will send the message that certain behaviors aren't acceptable.

Common interests are the basis for improving cooperation. The more clearly you identify how your interests overlap and become shared, the stronger you'll be in your response to the whole range of difficult behaviors.