

(U) Ask Zelda!: Reining in a Chatterbox

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) The following article is unclassified in its entirety:



Dear Zelda,

I have a co-worker who loves to talk and talk and talk. He dominates meetings and has to speak his mind at every turn. Many people have tried to get our co-worker to be less verbose, but we're an hour into a meeting and he's still talking. How can we kindly and politely get our co-worker to [SHUT UP!] and let other people contribute?

-- Tired of listening

Dear Tired Listener,

Ah, yes. I know the type. You may not be able to change your verbose co-worker, but you can prevent him from dominating meetings. The solution is **meeting management**.

The way this works is to have a very structured meeting and a meeting leader. The leader would send out a detailed agenda prior to the meeting, with times assigned for each portion. Here's one example:

Introductions (Sally, all) - 3 minutes
Description of issue (Sally) - 2 minutes
Possible courses of action (all) - 15 minutes
Vote on course to pursue (Sally) - 1 minute
Assignment of actions (Bill) - 2 minutes
Final thoughts/comments (all) - 5 minutes
Set-up of next meeting (Bill) - 1 minute

If Sally is running the meeting, she would state the purpose and any ground rules during the introduction portion. One ground rule might be a 2-minutes-per-person limit when soliciting input from the group. Or that any snacks brought into the room--especially those of the chocolate variety--be shared with the group. (Sally and I think alike.)

Another option is to have a moderator whose sole job is to make sure the meeting runs smoothly. This person would not contribute to the discussion but would keep track of time and agenda, make sure others are contributing equally (and that no one is monopolizing the conversation), and ensure the discussion stays on track.

When Chatty Charlie begins to run on, the meeting leader/moderator should cut him off at the time limit. If he is repeating himself or getting off topic, someone can cut in before that and summarize, then move things along. Something like this: "Charlie, I think you've stated your point about inviting one of the Ravens as a guest speaker. Let's see if anyone has any other ideas for improving our meetings." Or this: "Charlie, you've given us several good ideas already. How about if we hear from Laura and Pete?"

Formulas for good meeting management vary, but the key to solving your problem is structure and

policing. One other option would be to dispense with a meeting and send out or request information electronically.

So decide on a course of action and enlist the other tired listeners' help in sticking to it to rein in your chatterbox. Oops--my 2 minutes are up. Over to you!

Edits
