



## How Do You Handle A Person Who Tries To Dominate A Workplace Meeting?

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In an ideal world, everybody would play nice.

All meeting attendees would arrive on time, put away their devices, tune in to the discussion, contribute passionately, listen to their colleagues' opinions, understand the logical flow of the meeting process, resolve conflict amicably, and leave fully committed to the decisions of the group.

But teleconferences and face-to-face meetings can unfold similar to activities on the playground. You may have passive attendees and dominating participants that annoy each other and complicate the process (<http://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/the-problem-with-meetings-they-cost-more-than-theyre-really-worth/>).

### Why you can't let dominants dominate meetings

So why not just let the passives fade into the woodwork and let the dominants take over the game board? There are several reasons why not:

- They answer every question before others have time to respond to the challenge, analyze issues, and think for themselves.
- They hold the floor far too long and cause meetings to run too long.
- They often ramble and repeat themselves, creating boredom and impatience among the group members before decisions are reached.
- Their monopoly prevents other ideas and solutions from surfacing.  
Their biased opinion may not represent the group as a whole, and as a result, decisions and actions from the group may not accurately reflect the group's thinking.

So what's your role as a leader facilitator?

You serve in much the same capacity as a moderator for a panel or a presidential debate. Your goal is to create an environment where everyone has an opportunity to contribute (<http://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/8-ways-to-help-make-your-office-meetings-more-tolerable-2/>) to the discussion, and that often means putting some controls on the dominator.

### Here's what you can do to stay in control

You can:

- Accept comments from the dominator without yielding the floor — Giving verbal pats on the back typically encourages the person to keep talking and explaining. Examples of verbal pats on the back include: "That's an idea. Others?" "Good idea." "I like that." "That could work."
- Acknowledge a contribution with body language only — eye contact, a smile, a nod, an open palm — and then turn to someone else for another contribution.
- Call on others by name to jump into the discussion — "Jaime, what do you think about X?"
- Play traffic cop with a verbal cue — "Let's hear from several people on this issue." "We've already heard from Hank about how he thinks the engineers will accept the change. Somebody from Legal — what do you think about the proposed change?" Or, "I'd like to have everyone weigh in on this issue."
- Play traffic cop with your body language or voice — Simply raise your hand in traffic cop fashion when the dominant person continues to ramble on, break eye contact, and divert attention elsewhere in the room. If on a teleconference, break the dominator's train of thought during a long repetitious ramble by asking a

question like, "Julie, excuse me for interrupting here: Let me ask you a question about what you just said." Then ask a short-answer question. That distraction typically breaks the ramble and gives you opportunity to regain the floor after their short answer.

- **Call out the dominator by name** — "Tyler, I think we're getting off track here. Let me bring someone else into the discussion about what advantages they see for expanding the scope of the client project at this point." Calling a person's name puts them on the spot in a gentle way to relinquish the floor—and refocuses discussion quickly to relieve them of embarrassment.

To sum up, there's not much value in a meeting where only one or two people dominate the discussion. So if you're in charge, lead (<http://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/weekly-wrap-don-rumsfelds-8-rules-for-successful-meetings/>)!

This was originally published on Dianna Booher's blog at [www.BooherResearch.com](http://www.BooherResearch.com) (<http://www.booherresearch.com/>).

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