

HARD-TIMES

There are a number of behaviors and actions (Hard-times) that can negatively impact the effective functioning of a group meeting and/or delivery of a presentation. A group leader or facilitator can help address these behaviors/actions by employing the appropriate tactics to keep the meeting or presentation successfully on track. Below are many of the more common “hard-times” you may encounter:

Individual Hard-times

Hardtime	Description	Tactics
FILIBUSTER	Talks continuously, giving far more information or opinion than is useful to the group. Takes forever to get to the point.	Interrupt. Ask, “What’s your point”? Or say, “I think you point is _____. Is that right”? Get a “Yes” or “No,” thank the speaker, and direct the discussion to someone else.
DROP-OUT	Doesn’t talk often and may appear not to be paying attention.	Make sustained eye contact and look like you expect participation. Ask, “What do you think, (Name)?” Or, as the drop-out to record the group’s work.
DISTRACTOR	Talks off the subject, bringing up thinks for the group to talk about or do that are not in line with its purpose.	Refocus. Say, “I’d like to return to the task at hand”, and bring the group’s attention back to the appropriate topic. Say, “I think we’re off track,” and restate the topic the group should be discussing.
REACTIVE THINKER	Only reacts to other people’s ideas (usually critically. Never offers original ideas or constructive comments.	After the critical comment, ask, “What alternative do you suggest”?
HECKLER	Makes remarks or engages in nonverbal behavior that detracts from the speaker’s ideas and encourages disrespect for the speaker.	Say, “(Name), you don’t seem to respect what has just been said; what is your opinion”? When the heckling is of a nonverbal nature, respond to it as though it were a remark and ask for verbal elaboration: “I see you think there is an issue with the idea that was offered. What do you think is wrong with it”?

Hard-times in the Group Dynamics

Hardtime	Description	Tactics
GROUP-THINK	One or two people take all the initiative for new ideas and everyone else reacts, often in a critical fashion. Eventually, the initiators get careful to offer only “safe” ideas.	Use Nominal Group Process. Appoint reactors as presenters. Confront the pattern and ask reactors to take initiative.
SELECTIVE LISTENING	The group ignores the comments of one or two of its members. After their remarks, there are no questions or elaboration from others. Often after a polite acknowledgment, the subject is changed. (If the person being ignored is a habitual DISTRACTOR, this may be an appropriate group response, not a Hardtime).	Check the group structure. Why did you invite the people who are being ignored? Help the group appreciate the consequences of ignoring them. Say, for instance, “You know, (Name) is probably closer to our customers than anyone else here. But we don’t seem to pay much attention to his remarks. Can we afford to ignore this perspective”?

FIGHT FOR THE FLOOR	Several of the members have a lot to say and are anxious to speak. Typical symptoms are interruptions, talking simultaneously, and making remarks that are not logically related to the immediately preceding statement (because the members are preparing their remarks rather than listening to each other).	Capture every comment on a flip chart. (This at least preserves the remarks for later consideration, and this often diminishes participant's anxiety about being heard. Often the very act of listing drives the group to a more rational process.) Or, break the group into smaller groups until everyone has had a chance to speak. The smaller groups can sort, prioritize, and condense the ideas for presentation to the larger group.
FEAR OF CONFLICT	The group is carefully polite and "friendly." Every time it approaches a specific statement of its issues it slows down, delicately checks for consensus, and if it finds none readily available, it veers away to another issue. Anytime disagreement is expressed, it is done obliquely and often with a preface and postscript of apology.	Discreetly check on the history of the group. You may find that "assassins" and "mad killers" are lurking beneath the officially polite appearance of some of your members. Ask the group to discuss conflict hypothetically: "What happens when members disagree? When is conflict functional? Dysfunctional"? Set ground rules before discussing issues that have potential for conflict.
FIREWORKS	The group becomes unrealistic in its resolutions because it assumes more authority for itself than its charter allows. The resolution may have logical coherence, but it is beyond the group's ability to implement or follow-up. The resolution goes up in the air and pops like beautiful fireworks; after the display, it's all over.	Review the group's charter. By what authority is this meeting called, what are the expected results, and how is the group supposed to relate to the rest of the organization? Test the reality of the resolution with Gantt Planning.
WATERWORKS	The group is long on analysis and short on resolution. The analysis has the flavor of "ain't it awful." The meeting has either no vitality at all, or it derives its vitality from shared frustration.	Review the group's charter. The group is either failing to recognize its authority or is in fact without authority (in which case you should discontinue the meetings). Use Gantt Planning to focus on solutions.
WHEEL-SPINNING	The group keeps repeating itself, back up and running over the same ground.	<p>Check the memory system. If there is no record, being charting so the group knows what it has accomplished.</p> <p>Remind the group where it is in its procedure. "Preview" the next step by listing the issues the group should address next, and who should address the issues.</p> <p>Sometimes the group anticipates that the next step will involve conflict, failure, or other punishing consequences. If this is the case, help the group "glimpse" into the next step.</p> <p>Suggest that the members pair up and review the group's progress and think about what it should do next. Or have each member write down and then share the answers to these questions: "At the next step, what's the worst that could happen? What's the best that could happen"?</p>

Hard-times in Process

Hardtime	Description	Tactics
FOGGY AGENDA	The group wanders in its discussion, gets several issues going at the same time, or just runs out of steam.	Restate the meeting objective. Use an Agenda Building procedure to identify, sort, and prioritize all the different issues. Use a "Bin List" to acknowledge and set aside the extraneous issues.
SKATING	The group skims along the surface of its issues, being long on opinion and suggestions but short on facts.	Usually Skating is due to poor preparation on the part of the members. Help the group build its database. List the information the group would like to have in order to deal with the issue. Follow this with research assignments and reschedule the meeting.
PROCEDURE JUMP	The group finds itself unable to proceed or arrives at faulty resolutions because it hasn't completed the prerequisite steps in its procedure; it has jumped over steps in the procedure.	Brief the group at the beginning of the meeting on all steps in the procedure. Post a list of the steps so the group can refer to it. In case of a "jump" during the meeting, back the group up to the missed step and come forward from there again.