

# Module 6

## How to Deal Effectively with People



Introduction

Dealing with a Hostile Situation

Effective Communication

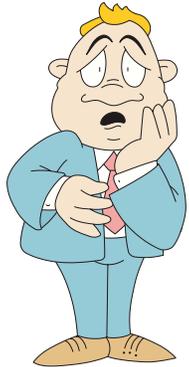
Seven Difficult Personality Types

Roadblocks to Communication

Nine Ways to Build Trust and Credibility

# Why it is Important to Deal Effectively with People

When dealing with diverse audiences and controversial topics we often come across people that are difficult. If we treat the public with courtesy and professionalism, we eliminate the personality conflicts that often cloud the actual issues. During workshops, presentations and public hearings, a citizen's anger is usually situation oriented, but it may feel as though it is directed at you personally. Becoming defensive, trying to cut the complaint short, or even arguing back are not productive responses and often prolong the uncomfortable atmosphere.



Every contact provides an opportunity to improve your relationship with the public. This can be done by developing good communication skills, keeping calm, and showing, by your actions, that you and your office are competent, caring, willing and able to correct errors as fast as possible.



This module has been prepared to suggest ways to stay calm and be confident, thus being more responsive to citizens. It is designed to show how to keep your "cool," stand your ground and reach a positive solution. It will help you deal with the public more effectively and will assist you in working more productively with your co-workers and project team members.



# Dealing with a Hostile Situation

When dealing with a hostile situation, the pace of your response is critical. Hostile people want you to feel how urgent their problems are and respond at once. Within the first two minutes of becoming aware of the situation, you should establish empathy with the situation and begin asking questions to determine the nature of the problem. Within four minutes, you should be implementing the strategies to deal with the problem.



Why four minutes? Four minutes is not an arbitrary time limit. Research shows that four minutes is the average time for which strangers interact before they decide to part or to continue their encounter. If people do not perceive that you are responding positively by the end of the first four minutes of contact, their anger will generally escalate.

## Step #1: Deal with the person's feelings!

### Empathize

- If the situation is noisy or disturbing others, take the person to a private place. If a private place is not available, try to distance the disturbance from others who might be drawn into the situation. Have additional staff ready to assist you at meetings.
- Position yourself at eye level with the hostile person by standing or sitting, thus establishing eye contact. Looking at the person enables you to judge the emotional content of the words.
- Show your concern for the person by your facial expression, body position, gestures, and tone of voice. On the phone, your tone of voice and word choice are your only tools for showing empathy.
- Show your sincere interest with empathetic responses. Acknowledge the person's feelings.

Some examples:

- a. "I am sorry that this situation has upset you."
- b. "That really does sound upsetting... I do not blame you for being concerned and upset."
- c. "I can see how this would be a problem."
- d. "I can understand your concern about..."
- e. "I am sure it is difficult to be..."

# **CAUTION:** Do Not Proceed To Step #2 Until You Are Sure You Have Dealt With The Person's Feelings.

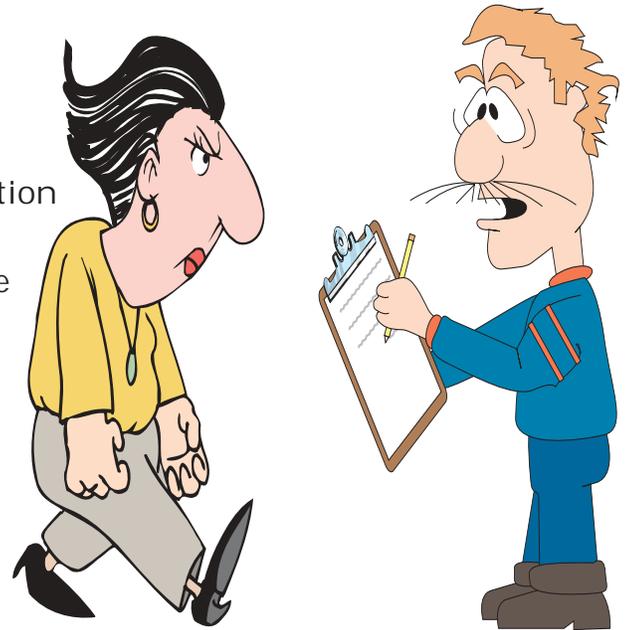
## Step #2: Identify the person's problem!

### Ask questions

- The goal here is to determine what happened in order to decide either to whom to refer the person or how you can help.
- Record names, dates, project number, locations, etc.
- Some examples of questions include:
  - a. "Who told you that?"
  - b. "What did you do then?"
  - c. "Why did you think that?"
  - d. "Could you give me an example?"
  - e. "Can you explain how that happened?"

### Give feedback

- Ask and use the person's name often in conversation (use their first name only if requested).
- Identify yourself to the person and give assurance that **you** will work to resolve the problem.
- Acknowledge any positive aspects about the concern even if you believe that the person is essentially misinformed.
- Repeat important words as you listen.
- Some examples of feedback include:
  - a. "I do not understand...."
  - b. "Please tell me more about that."
  - c. "You are correct in saying that...."
  - d. "It does sound like..."



### Summarize

Repeat the situation back to the hostile person to be sure you have the facts correct. Ask them to validate or correct your summary.

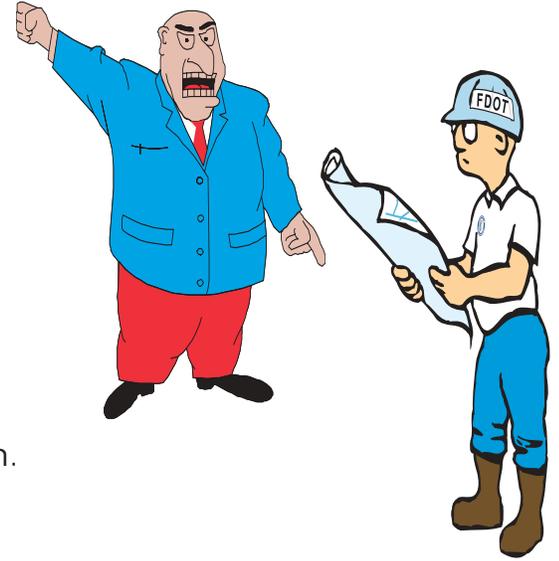
# Step #3: Deal with the person's problem!

## Find out what the person wants

- Listen carefully to the remedies the person has already tried.
- Ask the person what they would like the FDOT to do to solve the problem.

## Suggest alternatives

- If you cannot do exactly what the person wants, tell them what you *can* do.
- When possible, offer the person a choice about possible courses of action. Choices help people feel more in control and, therefore, less hostile toward the situation.



## Share information

- Explain exactly what you are going to do and how long it is likely to take.
- If the response will take time, keep in touch with the person to provide updates on your progress. Keep a record of your correspondence.
- Reassure the person that you are an ally in solving the problem and will work to resolve any adversarial situation.
- Admit the error if FDOT has made one. Do not excuse or minimize a mistake.

## Agree on a solution

If the final solution cannot come at once, suggest a mutually satisfactory interim step:

- "Now that you have given me all these facts, I will look into this situation and call you before 3:00."
- "I will be happy to .... Is that acceptable? No? What would you like for me to do? I'm sorry, I do not have the authority to do that, but I will be happy to help you any way I can. How about this idea ....?"

Dialogue of this type often prompts a degree of reason in people making unreasonable demands because it lets them see the realistic limits of your authority.

## Follow up

Maintain your credibility by calling or writing back when or before you promised, even if you have not been able to find the answer or resolve the problem.

# Effective Communication

Dealing with people in a public setting, such as a workshop or hearing, requires some special *strategies* and *techniques*. Citizens may be hostile because they fear loss of control, property rights, access, business earnings or the unknown. Use the strategies and techniques listed below to achieve effective communication.

## Strategy #1: Be prepared.

Before every meeting make sure you:

- Understand project processes;
- Understand the issues;
- Understand the community climate on the issue(s); ✓1.4.1
- Identify the community leaders;
- Research the points of resistance; and
- Practice some possible responses.

## Strategy #2: Create a comfortable atmosphere.

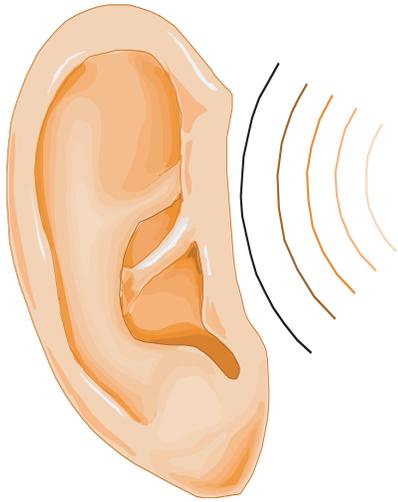
The meeting site should be conducive to open discussion by including comfortable temperature, appropriate space, adequately spaced table/chairs, and refreshments (which are funded through a non-FDOT source). ✓4.5.1

## Strategy #3: Level the playing field.

- Explain the project process and schedule so everyone knows what to expect; ✓1.2.3
- Establish clear ground rules within which the group can work;
- Provide a code of conduct;
- Clearly explain the meeting format, including the audience's role. ✓4.2.2

### GROUND RULES FOR DEALING WITH A HOSTILE SITUATION

1. Identify issues to be discussed.
2. Determine time allotted per issue.
3. Discuss one difficult situation at a time.
4. Do not tolerate personal attacks (establish code of conduct/behavior).
5. Do not challenge the participant's motivation and/or intention.
6. Respect personal integrity and values.
7. Do not stereotype.
8. Keep commitments.
9. Do not tolerate delays used to halt the process.
10. Regard disagreements on issues as challenges or conflicts to be resolved.



## Technique #1: Listen.

### **Stop talking**

Listening is not possible while you are talking.

### **Eliminate distractions**

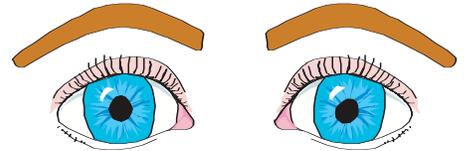
Put down any papers or pencils you may have in your hands; they distract your attention.

### **Leave emotions behind**

Try to push your worries, fears, anger, and/or problems aside. They may prevent you from listening well.

### **Look at the other person**

The person's face, mouth, eyes, and hands help to communicate. Paying attention helps you as well. It also makes the person feel you are listening. Your non-verbal behavior shows that you are concentrating on what is being said.



### **Do not argue mentally**

It is a handicap to argue mentally as someone is speaking. This sets up a barrier between you and the speaker.

### **Concentrate on what is being said**

Actively focus attention on the person's words, ideas and emotions.

### **Empathize with the other person**

Put yourself in the other person's place so that you can understand how the person may be affected by the project and what he or she is trying to achieve.

### **Ask questions**

When you do not understand, when you need further clarification and when you want to show you are listening, ask open ended questions.

### **React to ideas, not the person**

Do not allow your reaction to the person to influence your interpretation of what is being said.

### **Be patient**

Do not interrupt others; give them the time to say what they have to say. Let them express their own feelings and experiences.

### **Get the main points**

Concentrate on the main ideas. Keep on track.

### **Share responsibility**

Only part of the problem-solving responsibility rests with the speaker. You as the listener have an important role in trying to understand and asking for clarification.

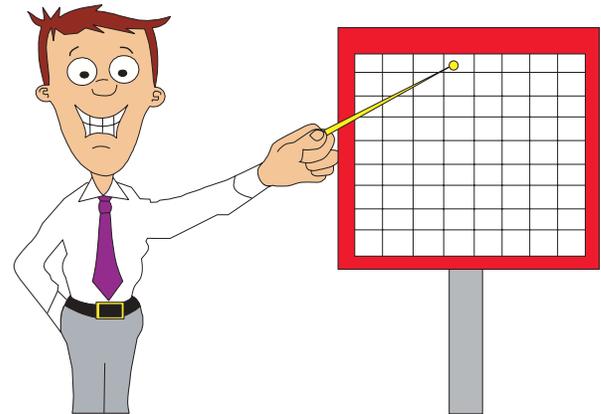
## **Technique #2: Present your message clearly.**

A positive image is critical in managing hostile situations. In addition to appropriate body language, creating a positive image requires using effective presentation skills.

The following guidelines will help you prepare and deliver effective presentations:

### **Style:**

- Maintain good eye contact;
- Speak in a clear voice;
- Project your voice so you can be heard by all;
- Move around the room comfortably;
- Use note cards as key point reminders;
- Use positive body language; and
- Project enthusiasm and confidence.



### **Content:**

- Sincerely welcome the audience and introduce the project team;
- Grab the audience's attention during the first two minutes;
- Be brief, concise and informative;
- Explain the purpose of your presentation;
- Describe the project situation, including known community concerns;
- Identify possible solutions;
- Explain "where we go from here";
- Ask for questions and comments; and
- Summarize key points at the end.

## Visuals:

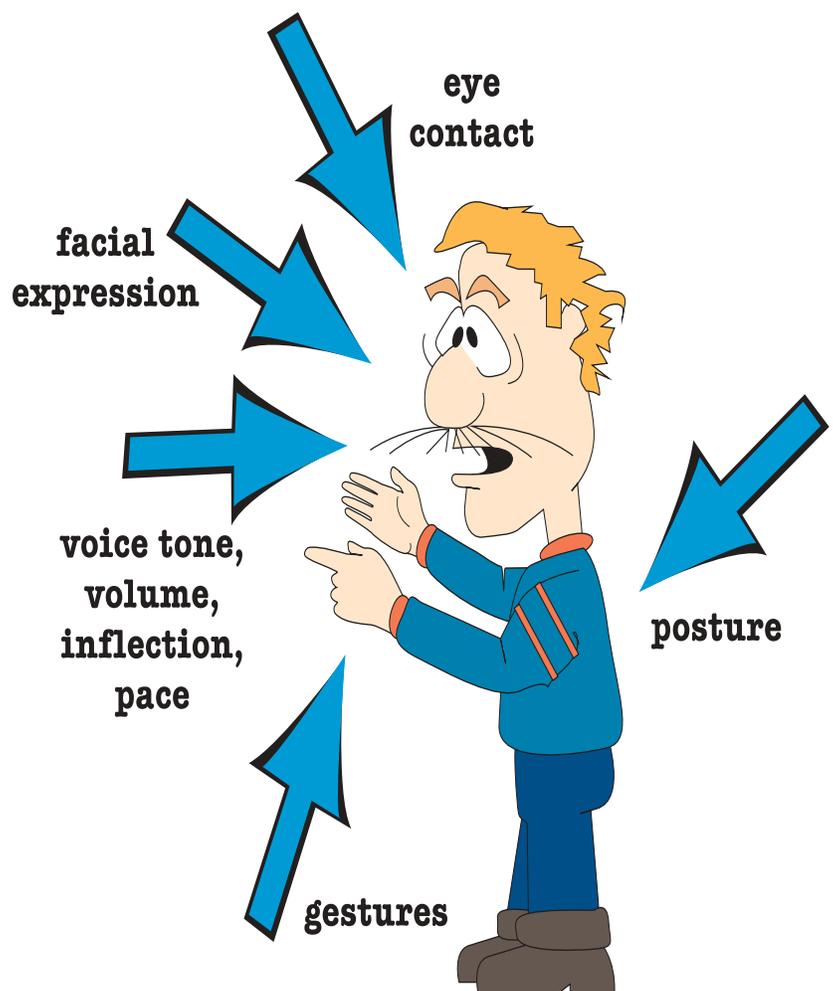
- Text and graphics must be easy to read and understand; ✓ 3.3.1-4
- Audio-visual medium should be appropriate for the room and audience;
- Use color effectively;
- Use a variety of visual elements; and
- Use simple, clear and colorful charts, diagrams and pictures.

## Technique #3: Use appropriate body language.

“Body language” refers to all aspects of interpersonal communication beyond the choice of words. These include eye contact or lack of it; facial expression; voice tone, volume, inflection and pace; gestures, movements, or lack thereof; and posture.

Being continuously aware of all aspects of one’s body language is not possible, but some awareness is very important. In dealing with people, the other person might not be able to list all body language signals during an interaction, but they unconsciously respond and interpret them as part of “decoding” your “encoded” message. This process is automatic, constant, and complex.

By learning some body language signals to accompany words, you will be perceived as a person in control. The matrix on page 6.3.5 illustrates ways to improve your body language.



		<b>ELIMINATE</b>	<b>MINIMIZE</b>	<b>PRACTICE</b>
		the following because it may appear too aggressive:	the following because it may appear that you are not in control:	the following because it will appear that you are calm, cool, and in control:
<b>FACIAL EXPRESSION:</b>	<b>POSTURE:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>erect, tense, rigid shoulders; jerky movements.</li> <li>chin up or thrust forward</li> <li>sitting: heels on desk, hands behind head or tensely leaning forward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>slumped</li> <li>shoulders forward</li> <li>shifting often</li> <li>chin down</li> <li>sitting: legs entwined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>erect but relaxed</li> <li>shoulders straight</li> <li>few shifts, comfortable</li> <li>head straight or slight tilt</li> <li>sitting: legs together or crossed</li> </ul>
	<b>GESTURES:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>chopping or jabbing with hands</li> <li>clenched hands or pointing</li> <li>sweeping arms</li> <li>sharp, quick nods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fluttering hands</li> <li>twisting motions</li> <li>shoulder shrugs</li> <li>frequent head nodding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>casual hand movements</li> <li>relaxed hands</li> <li>hands open, palms out</li> <li>occasional head nodding</li> </ul>
	<b>EXPRESSION:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>furrowed brow, tight jaw</li> <li>tense look, unblinking glare</li> <li>patronizing or sarcastic smile</li> <li>tight lips</li> <li>showing anger with disapproving scowl, very firm mouth or bared teeth</li> <li>extreme flush</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lifted eyebrows, pleading look</li> <li>wide-eyed, rapid blinking</li> <li>nervous or guilty smile</li> <li>chewing lower lip</li> <li>showing anger with averted eyes, blushing</li> <li>guilty look</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relaxed, thoughtful, caring or concerned look</li> <li>few blinks</li> <li>genuine smile</li> <li>relaxed mouth</li> <li>control your anger</li> </ul>
	<b>VOICE:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>steely quiet or loud, harsh "biting off" words</li> <li>precise measured delivery</li> <li>sarcastic laughter</li> <li>statements that sound like orders or pronouncements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quiet, soft, high pitch</li> <li>"uhs", "ahs", hesitations</li> <li>stopping in "midstream"</li> <li>nervous laughter</li> <li>statements with voice tone rising at the end (like questions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>resonant, firm, pleasant, smooth, even-flowing comfortable delivery</li> <li>laughter only with humor</li> <li>even voice tones when making statement</li> </ul>

# Seven Difficult Personality Types

## 1. Attackers

**Behavior:** Attackers assert their viewpoint forcefully. They require people to listen to what they say. They need room and time to blow off steam.

**Action:** Address the attacker quietly, firmly and by name. Ask them to sit. Then listen carefully to what the attacker has to say. Once calmed, the attacker usually becomes reasonable and may suggest valuable solutions. The worst coping behavior in response would be to return the attack.



## 2. Egotists



**Behavior:** Egotists also assert themselves but, unlike attackers, they may be subject experts.

**Action:** Show honest respect for their knowledge, but do not become intimidated by it. Instead, capitalize on what they know by asking questions. Compliment them when they provide helpful information, but make sure they know you are the leader.

## 3. Sneaks

**Behavior:** Sneaks take “potshots” and often use sarcasm as a weapon.

**Action:** Confront sneaks with direct questions and let them know you do not appreciate their sarcasm. Use positive reinforcement when possible to steer them toward becoming more of a team player.



## 4. Victims

**Behavior:** Victims see everything negatively. They act powerless and defeated, often whining about everyone and everything.

**Action:** Ask them for suggestions to improve the situation. Have them state the negatives and address each logically and positively.



## 5. Negators

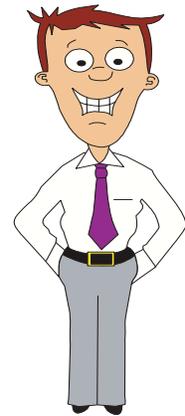
**Behavior:** Negators are usually suspicious of those in authority and believe that their way of doing things is the *only* way.

**Action:** Let negators use their negative “ammunition” in a group meeting, then let peers express their views about possible solutions. They will usually try to “enlighten” negators that better solutions exist.

## 6. Super-agreeable People

**Behavior:** Super-agreeable people have such a strong need to be liked that they do whatever you request at the expense of their own needs. They will over commit and often disappoint and frustrate everyone.

**Action:** Make sure they are not overworked.



## 7. Unresponsive People

**Behavior:** Unresponsive people are the most difficult people to manage. They are seemingly impossible to draw out.

**Action:** Use open-ended questions that require more than a “Yes” or “No” answer. Wait for a response. Resist the urge to finish sentences for them. Follow up on actions assigned to them and give them assignments to present at future meetings.

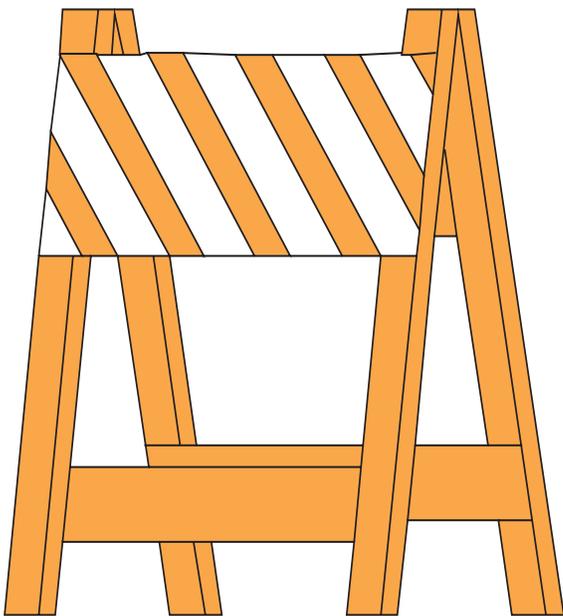
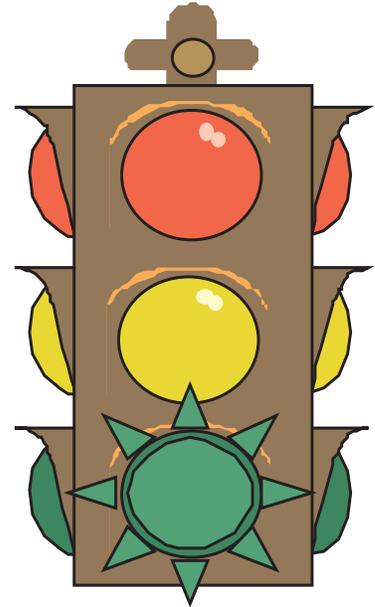


# Roadblocks to Communication

Roadblocks to communication are those *speech habits* and ways of communicating which frequently appear in our everyday conversation. They are more common than we like to admit. Becoming aware of and eliminating such barriers will improve our communication skills.

## Do:

- Encourage people to take action.
- Tell the person about positive outcomes and benefits.
- Let the person determine how to solve the problem.
- Give full information and show examples.
- Be objective and sincere.
- Accept everyone's input: treat people equally and fairly.
- Always be positive in action and response.
- Be empathetic with people's situations.
- Listen carefully and offer a focused response.



## Don't:

- Order, direct or command people.
- Tell the person about negative consequences due to their actions.
- Tell a person how something ought to be done.
- Try to change the other person's opinions.
- Be judgmental or patronizing.
- Put other people or their opinions down.
- Explain other people's actions.
- Diminish the other person's experience.
- Assume you understand another person's point of view.

# Nine Ways to Build Trust and Credibility

