

Client Types

Group Dynamics

Because our walks are limited to six people the dynamic among participants is an important element. With large groups a guide or lecturer can simply talk and talk and not worry too much about how the group relates to one another. But these are "walking seminars." They are meant to be interactive.

Sometimes the dynamic between walk participants can be challenging. Perhaps one couple have been to this city numerous times and have advanced knowledge of the topic we're discussing, while another couple are here for the first time? Perhaps one person is a dominant participant possibly "hijacking" the conversation, while someone else is quiet?

The vast majority of Context clients are fascinating, interesting and interested. But every once in a while a client is a bit challenging. We've found a useful resource in [Coping with Difficult People](#), by Robert Bramson, Ph.D. Here are some basic suggestions from the book. The basic steps in the process of coping are:

- assess the situation (prototype rather than stereotype)
- stop wishing people were different
- understand from the inside, use empathy
- formulate a coping plan
- implement and modify as needed.

And Bramson identifies several different types that you may come across in your work life, no matter where you work. Not all of them are relevant to your Context work, but some of them may be useful (and a sense of humor always helps!)

Category	How to Recognize	Strategies for Coping
Sherman Tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Their need to be right ● A sense of what others should do ● Tend to devalue those who lack confidence ● Judge others as inferiors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stand up for yourself. Make genuine and solid contact ● give them time to run down. Look directly at them and wait. ● Don't worry about being polite, interrupt. ● Get their attention--speak to them by name. ● speak from your own point of view ● Get ready to be friendly after confrontation.
Sniper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unrealistic expectations. If I undercut you, I reaffirm my own importance. ● Strong sense of how others are behaving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Surface the attack, "Do I understand that...?" ● Provide alternatives to a direct contest. ● Seek group confirmation or denial, "anyone else see it that way?" ● Don't directly contradict allegation or allow to pass as truth. ● Deal with the problem.
Exploder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The adult tantrum ● An equalizing mechanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help them regain self-control ● Give them time to run down ● Get their attention ● Interrupt the interaction ● Show your serious intention

Complainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Just as it sounds. Hard to ignore as it sucks in others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listen attentively ● Paraphrase what they say, end with best guess on how they must feel ● Be prepared to interrupt, politely but firmly. ● Use limiting responses; state facts without comment or apology. ● Switch to problem solving mode. ● If all else fails, ask, “how would you like this conversation to end?”
Clam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Non-verbal, silent ● Doesn't talk when you need or want conversation from them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask open ended questions ● Use the friendly, silent stare (but don't make it a contest!) ● Don't fill the space ● Help break the tension ● Be attentive when clams do talk! Demonstrate active listening and look for the connection between their statements and the topic.
Super Agreeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They let you think they're in agreement, but really not. ● Need to be liked--avoidance of any conflict ● They make others feel good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make honesty non-threatening ● Connect with them personally, ask about their families ● Listen well to help surface underlying issues
Negativist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dampen any suggestion ● They gain power by tapping into our potential for despair ● Convinced they have little power ● Believes that others don't care or self-serving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid getting drawn in ● State your own realistic optimism, repeat as needed, mention past successes ● Beware of creating negativism yourself ● Don't try and argue them out of position but use them to help create solution

<p>Balloon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phony know it alls ● Speak with a great deal of authority about subjects that they have little or limited knowledge. ● Desire to be admired and liked by others ● Often only partially aware that they're way beyond their own knowledge ● Curious and alert to information, but only take in partially 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● State real facts as an alternative version without directly saying, "you're wrong." ● Give them a face-saving way out ● Fill the conversation gap yourself.
<p>Bulldozer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tone of absolute certainty ● Little room for other's judgements, creativity, resourcefulness ● Hard to dissuade ● When something goes wrong, fault lies with you. ● Tightly held knowledge is a bedrock of their beliefs ● Little need to listen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make adequate preparations ● Listen and acknowledge ● Question and suggest ● Monitor your own tendencies towards bulldozering ● Make time for reflection ● Acknowledge their competence