



Group behaviours to beware of

TN119 Training Notes series: Management

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These notes are not just for those who lead groups in churches but for all members of such groups. The aim is to help everyone identify the kind of behaviours that people (even themselves) display when they meet with others, with some ideas for how to overcome any difficulties these pose.

There are all kinds of groups in churches. Formal groups include councils and committees, church staff, home groups, children and young people's groups (these notes apply to all ages), the choir or music group, activity groups such as flower arrangers, study groups, prayer triplets, and so on. Informal groups include a one-day work-party, groups of friends who get together over coffee, those passionate about a particular issue, even extended families. Don't ignore large groups such as congregations.

You may be familiar with the more specialised idea of 'group (or team) roles' but these notes relate to *behaviours* that you may notice, rather than the roles that people may fulfil. Bear in mind too that people often behave in a different way when in a group than when on their own. And in different ways in different groups too!

Take any group you are involved in and see if you can identify people who behave in the following ways. Some have a truly positive side to them, but all can cause problems. Here are eight of my friends, or aspects of myself.

- **Boris the bore**

Boris is the person who turns any conversation over to his one pet subject – and it's one for which everyone knows what his views will be. It might be something highly specialised or political or along the lines of 'things are not what they used to be', or should be, in his view. To make matters worse he may speak slowly and deliberately and be unflinching when someone tries to bring his carefully crafted speech to a speedy conclusion.

It may be that the first time he speaks he needs to be listened to, before the group moves on to others' views. He has a need to be heard and the group should perhaps meet that need. But if he then harks back to the same point again, a leader or chair might cut in and explain that the group has noted his point but now needs to move on to hear from others.

Who is the Boris in the groups you belong to? Might he sometimes have a point? Might he ever be you?

- **Fearne the fearful**

Ferne has so much to give but keeps quiet in your group. Whether it is a committee, a home group or an activity, she plays solo and does not contribute. She spent a whole year on the Church Council without saying anything.

Before you start to criticise Fearne, whose fault is this? On the Council it may be too many like 'Tanya the Talker' but at heart it comes back to the role of Chair. In a home group it would be the leader, although others may be better able to ask the gentle question that would get her talking.

If you are a group leader, who is (or are) Fearne in your group? If it is you, will you let others help you if you are naturally shy?

- **Gos the gossip**

Gos is a natural chatterbox, and loves it when other people are attracted to him because of his insider knowledge and the stories he can tell about almost anyone you know. It's a pity that his stories sometimes go a little further than the truth but it certainly makes for an attractive tale.

He would be the first to agree that a group discussion should be confidential and he never meant to pass on the key points to his circle of friends the next day. But during the friendly conversation in the pub a few bits just popped out and, he thinks, did no harm. Except that his slant on the subject wasn't quite what others would have recognised and the issue in question could cause great hurt just at this moment if others knew about it.

Gossip in a church (just for your prayers of course) can do huge damage but many of us, if we are honest, are tempted by this. Gos needs to be challenged, and probably more by those he is talking to rather than those in leadership who can only suspect he may be the source of a leak. Perhaps the group needs to discuss seriously the havoc that gossip can wreak.

Do you need to challenge anyone who is gossiping to you or about you? Or are you Gos yourself?

- **Joan the joker**

With Joan in the group things will never get too serious. She can always be relied upon to come up with something creative to say that is witty and which breaks the ice. Any quiet group can be enlivened by Joan. In fact she can be a real asset and get other and quieter members talking. Even in a serious discussion a joker can cut tension and relax the whole group. Joan is especially useful in the early life of a longer-term group when people are somewhat wary of each other.

But she can overdo it because there may well be times when humour is out of place, in particular if it comes across as a flippant comment or a barbed aside aimed at someone else. But, by and large, Joan is good news for your group – unless she goes too far.

Who is the Joan in your group and is she behaving in a way that you should welcome? Do you need to say something if she goes too far from time to time? Might she ever be you?

- **Mona the moaner**

Mona is the group's Eeyore. Nothing is quite good enough for her. It may be the weather, the headline news, the Minister, or it may be your group: those who should really not be on it, or the way the notice for your last meeting went out too late.

The trouble is, that she is quite right about some things, so the meeting notice did go out too late, but she never seems to offer praise when something is done well.

It may well be that she is something of a perfectionist and you may need her high standards for accuracy and reliability. But she has the ability to drag the whole group down with her.

Most groups can cope with one Mona, when others can immediately offer a brighter picture. But if there are several Mona's the position is rather more serious. Perhaps you need to welcome the accuracy she brings but help her see the bigger picture when things other than detail may be more important.

But might you, if honest, ever be a Mona?

- **Reg the reference**

Reg knows his Bible inside out and at his home group meetings can give cross-references on almost any issue with ease. When it comes to committee meetings he knows the relevant laws and can cite chapter and verse for almost any issue. He is really useful to have around but people are slightly in awe of his seemingly unbounded knowledge.

He's really good news except that he has a reputation to maintain and cites other Scripture passages or regulations to such an extent that you forget where you started from and what led to all this. So Reg is to be welcomed but a Chair or leader needs sometimes to keep their eye on the real issues and avoid the group going off on what starts well but ends up as a wild goose chase.

If you are Reg, learn to hold back a bit rather than play to a caricature. If you have Reg in your group, welcome his contributions but keep the focus where it should be.

- **Spencer the spiritual**

Spencer is a wonderful Christian and, for him, everything is about times of blessing, passionate worship, ecstatic utterances and the pictures that God gives him almost every day.

It may be that your group seems spiritually asleep and you long for a Spencer to bring it all back to a focus on Jesus Christ. Except that sometimes he seems to live life without

his feet on the ground. He has no problems, only opportunities for God to bless him. He seems to know little about normal life in the raw, as everything is spiritualised.

Spencer needs to see that God does not deal in the same way with everyone and that he has given us brains to use as well as spirits to soar. You need to get him to be the prayer-force behind the group but not be afraid to challenge him on some of the specifics of daily life on earth.

If you are Spencer, how could you give best support to this group in what it is seeking to achieve without putting people off?

- **Tanya the talker**

Tanya is the person who when the group is asked if anyone has ideas, comes in with something brilliant. And then she has a second idea, and even a third. In the prayer gathering she always prays first, and at length in superb prose. She also has quite a loud voice so that when the meeting breaks into small groups it's pretty difficult to focus on your three-some when Tanya's voice comes through persistently and very audibly from some distance away.

The point is that what she says is really valuable and her prayers are inspiring, but her much-talking, her volume and her irrepressible confidence in herself terrify the quieter members of the group.

If relationships are good, a leader or another group member should be able to have a quiet word outside any meeting to help Tanya see that perhaps she needs to hold back just a fraction to let others in. The trouble is that we are often too embarrassed to say anything that might be regarded as critical, and so the pattern continues.

Do you have a Tanya in your group and, if so, might you be able to have that quiet word from a firm relationship basis? Or might you just possibly be Tanya yourself? You may find silences embarrassing when you are bursting to come in, but that might be a better way forward.

There has been no space to mention other friends of mine such as Abbie the absent, Charles the change-blocker, Commie the compliant, Peter the peace-maker (at any price), Shona the shocker, among others.

God loves them all and there is, I know, something of several of them in me. Perhaps I need to take a deep breath and ask my nearest and dearest which of these most closely describes me. And then do something about it.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN119. See also Articles A45, *How to lead a team at church*, and A48, *Organising your small groups*, plus Training Notes TN41, *What makes a group a team*, TN79, *'One another' teams*, and TN94, *Becoming self-aware*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN119 under Management.

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