

Dealing with Difficult People

First, understand that there are always underlying reasons beneath people's challenging behavior. We do not always have time to get to the root of the challenge, but merely remembering that there is a root cause can help us with being empathetic in the moment. For example, someone who continually sighs and rolls their eyes when the leader is talking may have a physical condition that requires heavy exercise daily, and with all the talking and stopping, they are not meeting their personal goals and needs.

- **What a Leader Can Do: In front of the group:**
 - Thank the person and move on to the next subject
 - Thank the person for their participation and indicate it is time to hear from others.
 - Use humor to invite others to speak up
 - Acknowledge the person's expertise or experience and ask permission to call on them for specific examples
 - Restate intention of respect on the outing
 - Prepare for off putting questions
 - Have a second docent or other volunteer work with and listen to them
 - Let them know you will "find an answer" to that question

- **What a Leader Can Do In private:**
 - Provide constructive feedback about the impact of the behavior on the outing, the participants, and/or the Leader.
 - Be specific when describing the situation. Just say what you saw or what you heard. But do not state any assumptions about intention. This limits the odds of the person responding defensively.
 - Reach out to LandPaths Field Programs staff if there was a serious incident—in case a follow-up is needed with participant.

- **What a Leader Should NOT Do:**
 - Compete with the person.
 - Insult the person.
 - Stifle the person's enthusiasm.
 - Get defensive.
 - Express anger.
 - Let the person control the discussion.