

# Session 7: Over & Under-Talkers

In this session, we'll be talking about how to control over-talkers, how to draw out under-talkers, and how to become better listeners.

## CONTROLLING OVER-TALKERS

The following is a list of over-talkers. (Do you have any of these in your group?):

- Verbal processor - Processes out loud, often blurts out first thoughts.
- Storyteller - Uses lots of stories and/or illustrations to make a point.
- Well informed/expert - Wants to impart their knowledge to others.
- Over-eager/nervous - Gets lost in their nervousness or desire to have value.
- Passionate - Gets caught up in the emotion, overstates.
- Rambler - Like a rock tumbling down a hillside; just when you think it has stopped, it tumbles a little further down the hill.
- Rabbit trail - Loses track of where they were going, branches off from initial point.
- Punctuator - Conversation ball always bounces back to them; they add to what everyone else shares.
  
- How does an over-talker affect the **small-group leader**?
  - Distracts from direction, focus, people, the Holy Spirit.
  - Causes frustration, anger, feelings of helplessness or inadequacy.
  - Causes stress because the leader worries about others being able to share, frustration of others in the group, time limitations.
  - Hinders discipleship process (people can remain unknown).
  - Limits ability to shepherd and minister to others.
  
- How does an over-talker affect the **group members**?
  - Distracts from the lesson and/or discussion.
  - Causes frustration, anger, resentment.
  - Prompts people to respond inappropriately.
  - Limits the opportunity for others to share (causes people to not value the group).
  - Causes resentment toward the group leader for showing a lack of control over group.
  
- How do these over-talkers affect the **relational environment**?
  - Can make the group unsafe (lack of sharing from others, bad feelings/mood).
  - Hinders relationship; sometimes it can break relationship.

For the health of the group and safety of the environment, the small-group leader has an obligation to help control over-talkers, but how they go about doing this is very important.

- How **not** to respond to over-talkers:
  - In anger or frustration.
  - With cutting comments or sarcasm.

We **do** want to respond with care, love, respect, and gentleness. As we do this, we want to give the person value, not take it away. The following are some ideas for how to effectively deal with over-talkers.

Dealing with over-talkers **inside** the group:

Scenario: The group is discussing the story of the Lost Son from Luke 15. You've asked the question, "How do you think the father felt letting the younger son leave knowing that he would most likely encounter pain and hardship?" I'm the over-talker in your group, I've drifted in my answer, and now I'm talking about how easily I get lost in the shopping mall.

- **Challenge:** Gives the person sharing the opportunity to hit the target.
- Interrupt and challenge me to address the original question.
  - When redirecting, avoid using the word "but" as it tends to negate what preceded the "but" (devalues the person).
  - The solution is to simply split this into two separate sentences.
  - Example: "Let me stop you for a second. I appreciate your sharing. Help me understand how that relates to the question."
- **Redirect:** Stops the person sharing and redirects to someone else.
- Using the same scenario as before, interrupt me and redirect the question to someone else.
  - Example: "I appreciate what you're sharing. I get lost in the mall too. I'd love to hear some other perspectives on the question. Who else would like to share?"
  - Look away from the over-talker, opening it up for others to share.
- **Clarify and Redirect:** Stop the person who's sharing to clarify what they've said up to that point, then hand the question off to someone else.
- Using the same scenario, interrupt me and clarify what I've said, then redirect the question to someone else.
  - Example: "So I'm understanding from what you've shared that you empathize with the father, but that you also have a hard time finding your way around in the mall. Who else has something to contribute regarding the father watching his son move away?"
  - Look away from the over-talker, opening it up for others to share or call on someone specifically to pick it up from there.
- **Catch the Rabbit:** Stop the person on the rabbit trail and redirect to someone else to get the group back on point (this is much like the redirect, but you are being more direct).
- So far you haven't been able to stop my sharing, and now I've moved from talking about getting lost in the shopping mall to discussing the fishing pole I bought while I was lost in the mall. Interrupt me and let me know that I've drifted off topic. Then direct the question to someone else in the group.
  - Example: "Let me stop you there. I think you've drifted from the original question. Can someone remind me where we were trying to go?"
  - Look away from the over-talker, opening it up for others to share or call on someone specifically to get the group back on track.

- **IMPORTANT:** How you say this is very important. Smile and use humor, otherwise the over-talker can get offended.
- **Let the Rabbit Run:** Sometimes the Holy Spirit is leading us to a place we need to go that's different from what was planned. Being flexible and using discernment can have amazing results. Sometimes you need to catch the rabbit, and sometimes you need to let the rabbit run.
  - When and why would you want to let the rabbit run?
    - Serves a greater need (group versus personal).
    - Leads to personal healing/closure.
    - Helps the group discover biblical truth and gain a deeper understanding of Scripture (even if it wasn't the area of focus for that meeting).
    - Models to the group members shepherding and ministering.
    - Helps the group apply God's word.

Hard as we try, the small-group leader will never handle things perfectly, and feelings can and do get hurt. One thing to remember is **relationship gives grace to leadership inadequacies.**

Dealing with over-talkers **outside** of the group (private conversation). This can be accomplished in conversations before or after the group, or over coffee during the week.

- How could you help them understand the consequences of their over-talking?
  - Help them understand the effect their over-talking might have on the group members, on the environment, and on you as the leader (see points previously covered on this subject).
  - Help them understand that if they are over-talking, they probably aren't being a very good listener. This can be an obstacle to their effectiveness as they minister to and disciple others.
  - In your discussion, lead them to self-discovery rather than preaching at them. Example: "What effect do you think your over-talking has on the other group members?" "If you are the one doing most of the talking, what impact do you think that has on your ability to minister to others?"
- How could you coach them to overcome their over-talking issue?
  - Come alongside the person. Be up front with what you're seeing (the over-talking issue). If they are doing this in the group, they are probably doing it everywhere they go. Most over-talkers know this is an issue for them. If you approach them well, they will likely accept coaching from you.
  - Give them specific things to work on, methods, helps.

## DRAWING OUT UNDER-TALKERS

The following is a list of general categories of under-talkers:

- Shy/reserved
- Abused/hurt
- Low self-esteem
- Lacks knowledge/fears judgment or shame
- Speech/other issues
- Fear of public speaking
- Contemplators/internal processors
  
- How does the under-talker affect the **small-group leader**?
  - Distracts from direction, focus, people, the Holy Spirit.
  - Causes frustration, anger, feelings of helplessness or inadequacy.
  - Causes concern about how this affects others in the group and/or the environment.
  - Hinders the discipleship process.
  - Limits ability to shepherd and minister to the person.
  
- How does an under-talker affect the **group members**?
  - Causes people to feel they are being evaluated or judged, like they're on display.
  - Limits what people may be willing to share (safety issues).
  - Hinders relationship.
  
- How does the under-talker affect the **relational environment**?
  - Makes the group unsafe (sterile, shallow, impersonal environment).
  - Restricts relationship and community.

Just as with over-talkers, for the health of the group and creation of the relational environment, the small-group leader has an obligation to help draw out under-talkers. How this is accomplished is very important.

How **don't** we want to respond to under-talkers? (Give examples/role-play.)

- In anger or frustration.
- With cutting comments or sarcasm.
- Embarrassing them or making them feel defeated.

We **do** want to respond with care, love, respect, and gentleness. As we do this, we want to give the person value, not take it away.

Discuss the types of tools to use with under-talkers **OUTSIDE** of the group: (Give examples/role-play.)

- How can being curious about why someone is an under-talker help draw them out?
  - It shows empathy and a desire to understand their perspective; helps them overcome obstacles in a healthy way, shows love.
  - Do this by asking questions of concern: "I've noticed that you're pretty quiet in the group. How come? How can I help?"

- What things could you help under-talkers understand that might encourage them to open up?
  - Explain that variety of perspectives is healthy and needed in a group.
  - Remind them of the purpose of the group.
  - Discuss how each person affects the environment.
  - Explain why transparency and knowing one another is so important (love).
  - Let them know that it's okay to feel tension about opening up to others. This might be risky, but we are called to risk for the cause of relationship (Jesus' example).
  
- How might giving out the study/lesson/homework the week before help draw them out?
  - Give notice of topics/questions and then follow up with them during the week to get their thoughts before group. Ask them to share something particular with the group.
  - If they have pre-work to do, it helps them prepare to share.
  - Contacting them mid-week and finding out what they are learning and processing provides a great opportunity to call out things that would be important for them to share with the group.
  
- Share God's word – encourage with the truth of God's word:
  - 1 Corinthians 12:27, 22
    - Help the person see how they are a necessary part of the group.
    - Help them understand that even if they see themselves as the least valuable person in the room, God sees them as having unsurpassed value.

By not sharing, they are actually robbing the group of their perspective, and it just might be that God wants to use them to speak to What is most challenging for you in dealing effectively with over-talkers and under-talkers?

2. What is one of the best approaches you've used for coaching over-talkers? What about with under-talkers?

3. Why is listening so important as a small group leader?

- the entire group.
  
- Ephesians 2:10, 4:15-16
  - Help them see themselves through God's lens.
  - They are God's masterpiece.
  - They are created anew in Christ Jesus.
  - God wants to use them to help fulfill his plan and purpose.
  
- It's always risky to call on an under-talker directly in the group, but there are ways to do this if you word your questions carefully—use **close-ended** questions. These give them the ability to say “no” without undo embarrassment or stress.
  - “Is there something you would like to add?”
  - “Have you had a similar experience that you'd like to share?”
  - “Did you have some thoughts you'd like to share?”

## LISTENING

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19*

We all have a deep need to feel understood and cared about. Our feelings, ideas, concerns, and perspectives are important to us. When we think someone is really listening to us, we believe that our thoughts and feelings matter to them, and that makes us feel cared about.

Unfortunately, when it comes to our ability to listen to others, most of us think we are better at it than we actually are. The good news is there's hope. We're going to spend time working on our listening skills. Let's have fun as we compare and contrast what makes us good and bad listeners.

- Personally, what are your challenges to being a good listener? (Dig deep – spend a lot of time developing this question.)
- How do you know someone is listening to you?
- How do you know someone **isn't** listening to you?
- What does it feel like to not be listened to?
  - Feel unappreciated, uncared for, unloved, of little value.
- Why is it so important for us to listen well in our small groups? People need to:
  - Share – to be known and to know others, relationship.
  - Love/care/value each other.
  - Discover needs and minister to one another.
  - Pray for one another.
  - Understand where people are in the discipleship process.
- What are some consequences of **NOT** being a good listener – both inside and outside the group?
  - Doesn't honor people.
  - We can't love people well if we don't know them or what troubles them.
  - Doesn't show the love of Christ.
  - People won't open up to us or seek us out in the future.
  - Hinders relationship – breaks relationship.
  - Inhibits our ability to minister, disciple, and pray.
  - Inhibits our ability to understand God and to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Discuss the following listening skills:

- What are some verbal communication techniques that show you're listening?
  - Give verbal cues – “Yes, uh huh,” appropriate tone/feeling in responses.
  - Paraphrase, restate, or summarize what is being shared.
  - Seek understanding by using statements like, “What I hear you saying is...”.

- Draw the speaker out by using phrases like, “That’s interesting. Tell me more about that.” “I’m not sure I fully understand. Can you elaborate?” “That must have been difficult. How did that make you feel?”
- Give some examples of good non-verbal communication techniques that help with listening
  - Watch your facial expressions, lean slightly forward, keep an open, relaxed posture, don’t fidget, and don’t look at your watch. Nod your head while they’re speaking to show you’re listening and interested.

Let’s discuss the following questions. After we discuss each question, we’ll give you some suggested solutions to try both inside and outside your group.

- What are some environmental challenges to listening?
  - Suggested solutions: If possible, try to create a safe environment conducive to sharing. Minimize distractions, noise, and interruptions. Pick appropriate meeting places when possible.
- What are obstacles for you regarding caring about the person and/or what is being shared?
  - Suggested solutions: Genuinely care about the speakers. Have a heart of love and compassion for them. Think of them as being precious to God with “HANDLE WITH CARE” stamped on their foreheads. Appreciate their willingness to share openly and honestly, regardless of what’s being shared. Be empathetic and loving. Remember that God just might be using this person and conversation as a way to teach you something. Be humble!
- Do you rush a conversation?
  - Suggested solutions: Slow down and relax. Be focused on the speaker, not your agenda/next question. Pause after they’ve completed a thought to give them time to continue or go deeper before you speak. Be comfortable with silence. If you really don’t have time to fully hear them, suggest an alternate meeting time. Pray—remind yourself what’s really important.
- What impedes your ability to understand the person and/or what is being shared?
  - Suggested solutions: Don’t listen with the intention or attitude of “fixing” the person. Rather, listen to gain understanding and perspective. Don’t interrupt—you can’t listen while you’re talking. Listen far more than you talk. Don’t take back the conversation. Pray – ask God for wisdom and insight.
- Do you seem uninterested in the conversation and/or the person?
  - Suggested solutions: Pay attention to the speaker. Be alert, maintain eye contact, and don’t get distracted. Be truly interested. There’s a difference between looking interested and actually being interested. People can tell the difference. It sometimes helps to write down a word or two as the person is sharing as a reminder of a

point you want to discuss with them. Otherwise, you might be distracted from listening because you're trying to remember the point you want to make. Pray—ask God to break your heart for the person. See the person through God's eyes.

- What do you do when the person is sharing something shocking?
  - Suggested solutions: Don't react too much to what's being shared or how it is being shared. Keep your emotions in check. Pray—ask God to help you understand and to minister to the person. Pray for the appropriate words to share with them. Remind yourself that God is their solution—point them to him and his word.
- Do your own opinions, experiences, and/or filters get in the way of effective listening?
  - Suggested solutions: Make no assumptions. Don't judge or jump to conclusions. Check the filter you're listening through—your attitudes, beliefs, emotional associations, prejudices, and personal experiences. Be self-aware.

Discuss all the ways the intentional leader can help the group members be better listeners by:

- Modeling good listening skills.
- Encouraging – calling attention to good listening skills being utilized.
- Using ground rules.
- Vision casting in various ways.
- Coaching inside and outside the group.

In the next session, we're going to take listening to a whole new level. We'll be talking about how to listen "below the surface" to draw out the deeper issues and problems. This is usually where we discover a person's core issues. Often these core issues are directly related to their relationship with God and their understanding of his word.

Session Questions:

1. What is most challenging for you in dealing effectively with over-talkers and under-talkers?
2. What is one of the best approaches you've used for coaching over-talkers? What about with under-talkers?
3. Why is listening so important as a small group leader?