

## News-Service

- Ideas & Content for Editors -

The handling of notorious pessimists, naysayers and "class clown"

# With the "five-finger strategy" project managers bring peace to the team again

*The contents: Loud, annoying, discouraging - "troublemakers" in the team can be a real nuisance for project managers. But they also offer the project opportunities. Disrupters often feel uncomfortable, dissatisfied with the approach, or even point to undetected project risks. Expert Gaston Saborowski explains the easy-to-use five-finger method, which can be used to turn disrupters into dedicated team members.*

The developer leaned back in his chair and yawned loudly - in the middle of the project meeting. Embarrassed, the staff looked to the project leader. Not for the first time the developer showed his boredom in front of the assembled team. Sometimes he was busy with his smartphone, sometimes he wrote on his notebook; again and again his objections caused the discussion to go astray. This time, the project manager addressed it directly with the troublesome employee. But the conversation took an unexpected turn. Because the developer was indeed bored - by his tasks. He did not realize that he was disturbing the project. "I have given him more responsibility and more challenging tasks", reports the project manager. Soon the developer was his best team member.

Interferences in teams are annoying. In the worst case, they can break the whole project. Interference impairs concentrated work, stifles discussions and complicates the search for solutions. And they unnerve their colleagues. Still, project professionals should see some good in them. Notorious pessimists, eternal naysayers, and incorrigible "funny guys". "No one disrupts without reason", explains Gaston Saborowski, project management expert at next level consulting. He considers disrupters (also) as a resource, as a kind of early warning system in the project. For example, if you are bored with the team, you may have capacity to spare or need more challenging tasks. Or: notorious pessimists may also point to risks that the team has not yet adequately considered. "They can be useful for risk management," says Gaston Saborowski, "but

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project managers should not expose, discipline or punish them." Saborowski recommends a simple and effective strategy - the "five-finger strategy".

### First - the "thumb":

Honestly! Not every flippant objection or sarcastic commentary is a disturbance. Therefore, the project manager should first recognize a disruption as such. Did someone just had a slip of the tongue, made a bad joke - or is there more behind it? So: thumbs up or down?

### Second - the index finger:

Experienced project managers immediately address the real problems. They do not hesitate, for example, to interrupt a discussion and to address a disturbance. "Tell the troublemaker that his behaviour does not belong here", says Gaston Saborowski. It is also possible to express how the disturbance "feels" to the others and what reactions it causes. Do not forget: Many disrupters may experience a burning platform. They are not aware of their behaviour and the unrest they create in the project. Professional project managers remain objective; they point to disruptions - but do not punish anyone.

### Third, the middle finger:

The problem is on the table. How does the team deal with this? How is the disturbance really intended, what does the disrupter want to achieve with the behaviour? These questions are now to be discussed and clarified. After all, there is an unspoken message behind many disturbances: Employees may feel overwhelmed or suffer from difficulties in the team. Perhaps they cannot get used to the procedures and the processes, they are worried about the project risks, or they see a gap between their own goals and those of the project.

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### Fourth, the ring finger:

"Many interferers were unable to keep up with the tempo of the project, they do not cope," says Gaston Saborowski, "they are still busy with things that have been completed by others." So, they try to stall discussions. In this phase, project managers integrate the interferer back into the team. They discuss with their co-worker his open issues - and reach an agreement. "Some disruptions can be discussed in the team," explains Gunter Saborowski, "in the case of other impairments, experienced project managers choose the individual discussion." A constructive discussion atmosphere is preferable - also for the benefit of the project! "Worriers" sometimes identify risks, which have to be discussed openly in the team. Others can be salvaged for the project by relieving them of tasks or giving them different ones.

### Fifth - the little finger:

"The little finger is a reminder that small parts of an interference may remain - and are allowed to stay," said Gaston Saborowski. So, keep an eye open. Project managers should try to rein in disturbances and to reduce them to a tolerable level - instead of completely eradicating them. Because for many employees, occasional "disruptions" are also an important outlet to cope with stress and pressure.

#### About next level consulting:

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For direct enquiries please contact Raphaela Bel | [raphaela.bel@nextlevelconsulting.com](mailto:raphaela.bel@nextlevelconsulting.com).

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