

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Building Effective Community Teams

As I consider how we can help our culture steer away from eco-disaster, I think community groups play a key role. At their best, they allow us to channel our shared people power into reclaiming our lives, health, communities, and planet from the destructive and unconscious (but organized and well-funded) elites.

I also very much appreciate folks who participate in community groups. I understand the challenges of being largely unpaid, taking on serious issues, engaging with varied personality types, and straying from our culture's focus on entertainment and individual gain.

However, I think common negative dynamics in such groups can discourage participation and harm results.

Thankfully, we can all contribute to healthier dynamics, so groups can better fulfill their potential. Plus, the skills we develop here can benefit us in all areas of our lives, and cumulatively improve our culture's overall dynamics.

What's vital is for everyone in a group to pitch in. It only takes one person playing by abusive covert Machiavellian rules to spoil the whole project.

Here are some key tips I've developed for creating positive dynamics, based on my various experiences, including with some amazing teams — and ones that could've been great. I hope these ideas help our shared learning process.

Key Constructive Steps

1) Recognize the unique challenges of community groups. Everyone there likely feels pressure, for the reasons I mention above. So the group is a potential powder keg, and our actions can either inflame or soothe the dynamics.

2) Commit to developing skillful approaches to community groups.

We can't just treat them like business meetings, where people are motivated by financial and career rewards. Nor can we use social group principles, where people tend to have similar styles, choose to "be nice," and defer to harmful hierarchies. Instead, getting results requires that we systematically encourage positive personal *and* professional dynamics.

3) Actively nurture safe space that welcomes different styles. Sharing ourselves and learning about each other is key to creating a foundation for healthy relationships. This is especially vital at a group's start, when the bonds are tentative, fragile, and fluid.

4) Seek to understand different viewpoints. Look past your own beliefs in order to see the value in each person's unique style, gifts, and needs. Don't make negative assumptions about others. Ask questions to understand what's important to them.

5) Look for ways to support your teammates. What can you appreciate? How can you encourage their best selves and bridge differences? Especially support those who make an effort to initiate. Don't look first to critique.

6) Expect conflict; help it be useful. Don't try to suppress, attack, or avoid it. The process of negotiating differences is how we create our team's approach to the work. But we can't get there if people respond to the smallest discomfort either by exiting or unfairly attacking others, without even trying to negotiate.

7) Offer, and be receptive to, constructive proposals and requests. Look to create win/win outcomes. Don't skip doing this, then attack people for failing to magically know and meet your needs!

8) Step up. If you see something that could be done better, offer to help. Develop quality ideas to

serve the group. Contribute to the evolving process. Don't be an armchair quarterback, demeaning others without being on the field. Passivity corrodes momentum, burdens others, and encourages toxicity.

9) Learn to identify and constructively respond to what I call "warlike" behavior. That's when someone only cares about their views and needs, treats their opinions as facts, makes nonfactual identity-based personal attacks, doesn't care who they hurt, doesn't offer useful proposals, takes no responsibility for their choices, and/or refuses to negotiate for win/win outcomes. They might even seem charming, nice, or passive; this is about how they relate to differences.

This behavior will harm the group, so it's important to address. But don't respond in warlike ways. Instead, talk with the person (privately if possible) and invite them to have a mutually-respectful and collaborative conversation. If they refuse and continue this behavior, consider asking the group about its desired style, or reducing your role (in a non-blaming way).

Also, by uprooting warlike behavior in ourselves, we can improve our happiness, relationships, and results. For more on this topic, see www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7b.html.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of [The Organic Guides](#), and Editor and Lead Writer for [The Next STEP](#) newsletter. Email your questions about going green to EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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