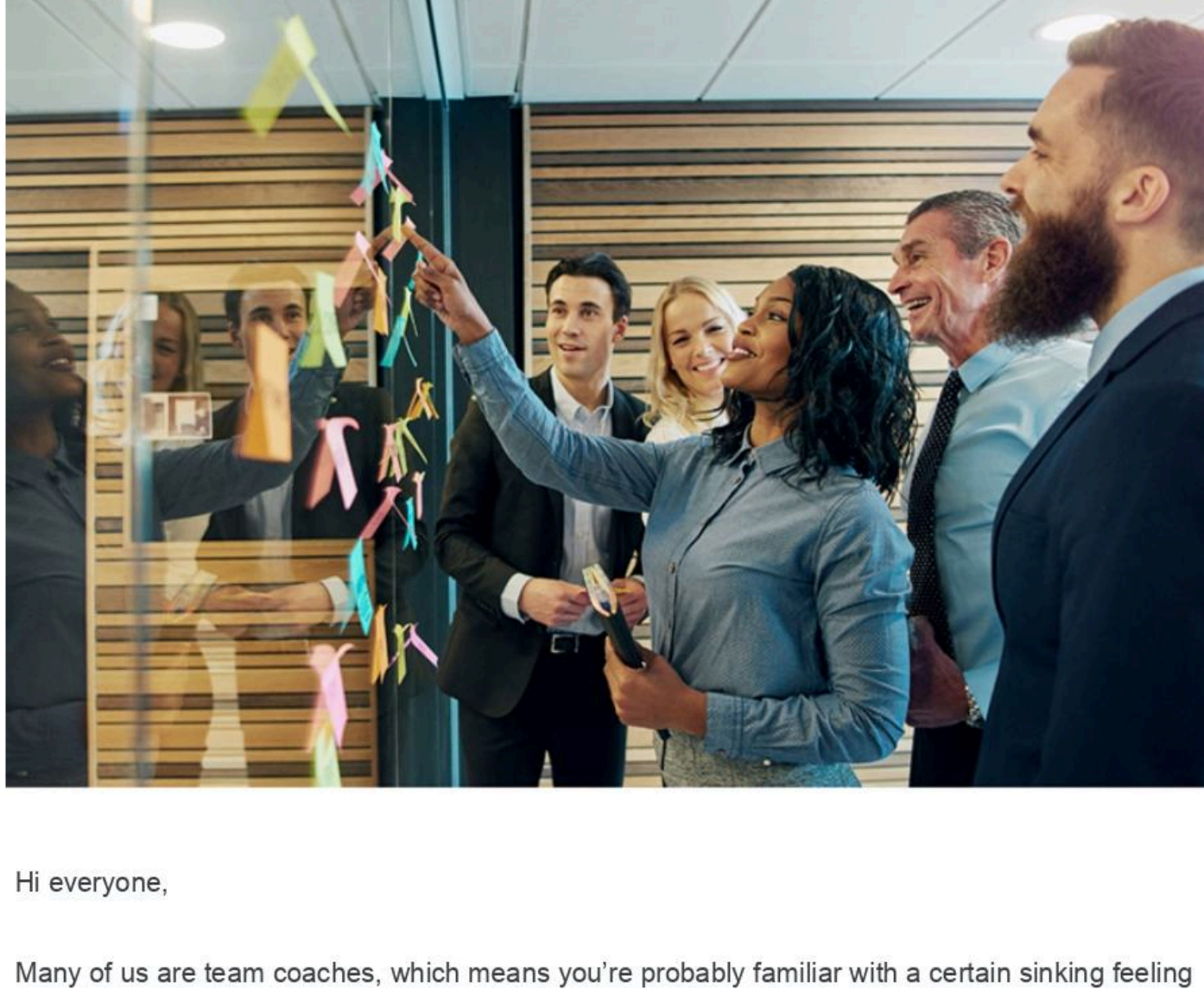




THE ICC ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

THE NEWSLETTER FOR GROWING GREAT COACHES

AUGUST 2025



Hi everyone,

Many of us are team coaches, which means you're probably familiar with a certain sinking feeling regarding dealing with difficult people. You begin a team or group coaching session and notice someone with their arms folded and a frown on. Or someone tapping on their laptop, or scrolling on their phone, or muttering to the person next to them whilst rolling their eyes.

Maybe you start to panic a little because the 'difficult person' may threaten to derail the whole session. How can you deal with people like this and keep your group sessions on track?

This month, we joined The Facilitator's Network workshop on Facilitating Through Challenging Behaviours, led by the wonderful Kerri Price. Kerri guided us through unpacking these kinds of situations as facilitators, and we quickly realised how relevant these insights are for team coaching too. A big thank you to Kerri for such a valuable session!

Difficult behaviours, not difficult people

First off, it's important to distinguish between challenging *behaviours* and challenging *people*.

To demonstrate, have you ever made a sharp and unexpected lane change while driving?

In that moment, you knew your driving behaviour was sub-optimal, but you also had some context as to *why* you drove badly. Maybe you were rushing to a meeting, or the sun was in your eyes, or you were distracted by the kids fighting in the back seat. There was poor behaviour, and you attributed it to *external, temporary* factors.

But what happens when we see other people cutting sharply across lanes without indicating? We mutter about how terrible they are at driving. We attribute their poor behaviour to *internal, permanent* factors like their lack of skill and their selfish personality.

This is called the **Fundamental Attribution Error**, and it's something you'll need to actively avoid, as a team coach or facilitator. Rather than assuming someone is a difficult person, focus on the difficult *behaviours* that you need to address for the session to succeed.

So what behaviours are difficult to deal with?

The product design and strategy firm, AJ&Smart, has a useful way of categorising workshop participants. Alphas want power, betas want knowledge or understanding, gammas want to understand the process, and omegas are the black sheep – they want to resist.

In general terms, challenges arise when facilitating with alpha types who dominate the airtime and want to run the show, and with omega types who are metaphorically dragging their feet.

Here are a few ideas to keep things on track.

Before the session

Get clear on the purpose

To reduce the risk of challenging behaviours, you need to be clear on the purpose of the session and what good looks like. Communicate this to the group ahead of time.

Understand the players

If possible, host pre-interviews with most or all of the team members ahead of time. This will allow you to understand the different personalities in the group, the informal roles that people play (eg the joker, the challenger), and what each person would like to get out of the session. With this information up your sleeve, you can design your session to better avoid unplanned flare-ups and tensions.

In the room

Agree on the norms

Effective gatherings are often governed by pop-up rules, or temporary norms that govern how we will act at this time and in this place. In a workshop or team coaching session, you can design pop-up rules (or rules of engagement, or team charters) to reduce the odds of challenging behaviours. For instance, [at sessions run by AJ & Smart](#) there are four standard rules: no devices, no judgment, trust the process, and have a break every 90 minutes. Your rules of engagement will depend on your context – but always ensure they are clear and that everyone explicitly agrees to them.

Tactics for talkers

Some participants love to share their thoughts and ideas, but they risk drowning out others. These tactics may help:

- **Harness the enthusiasm and give them a role.** If this is a benign form of enthusiasm – where people overshare with good intent, not because they think their view is right or best – then you could try giving the person a role in the workshop. This could be small and symbolic, for instance, saying an opening karakia or distributing materials to different groups, to help people feel important whilst freeing up the airtime for others.
- **Use 'pair, square, share' mechanisms**, where people speak in groups of 2 and 4, before joining in a plenary discussion. This multiplies the amount of airtime available and neutralises the impact of the over-sharer.
- **Use visual aids.** If a specific contributor is really dominating the discussion, you could introduce something like a 'talking stick' to allow only one person to speak at a time. Or you could give people 'talking tokens' of some sort, and each time you speak, you use up a token. This will balance the contributions from louder and quieter participants.
- **Run with it or park it?** People will naturally raise points that are important but off-topic for your particular session. You could respond in one of two ways. First, put the point back to the group – does this topic merit further discussion, or do you want to collectively move on? Second, if you decide to move on, create a 'parking lot' or a simple sheet/area to capture the important topics and points. That way, they're not lost, and the team can pick up the discussion later.

Making peace with protestors

What do you do if someone acts in an aggressive or hostile way towards you, or if they show signs of contempt? Try these tactics on for size:

- **Shift from confirmation bias to curiosity.** Kerri Price, head of the Facilitator's Network, says it's easy to assume disruptive participants are 'ignorant, stupid, stubborn or evil.' But as we noted earlier, that's falling prey to the Fundamental Attribution Error – and it won't help you to move the conversation forward. It's more helpful to dial up your curiosity by asking questions that start with 'I wonder', like "I wonder what's behind that comment?" Or with a [therapeutic lens](#), "I wonder what else might be going on for them? I wonder what has happened in the past that might be leading to this behaviour?" You don't need to ask these questions out loud – the goal is to get you into the right mindset as the team coach.
- **Harness the hostility of the 'black hat'.** You're probably familiar with Edward De Bono's 'six thinking hats,' which can be used by teams to productively think through an issue or opportunity. The overly negative participant is the '[black hat](#),' or the person who can point out everything that might go wrong, and all the reasons the plan won't work. Black hat thinking can be useful, at the right time. So if you have a black hat in the room, emphasise the value of this mindset for troubleshooting problems before they occur. However, allow the team to finish any blue-sky thinking and ideation before allowing the black hat to point out the issues. Or to use another framework designed by Disney Corporation, allow the Dreamer and the Realist to think things through first, before engaging the Critic.
- **Find the alignment.** If all else fails, you may need to have a private discussion with the person whose behaviour is challenging. You can use the 'COIN' framework to guide your discussion – developed by Anna Carroll in her book [The Feedback Imperative](#), this model provides a structured and effective way to provide objective and actionable feedback.
 - C is for Care. Make it clear you've listened to the person, and that you understand what they care about. (Eg "I know that you care about this team, and that you want to create a culture where everyone belongs.")
 - O is for Observation. Outline what you have noticed about the person's behaviour, in specific and neutral terms. (Eg "I have noticed you cut three people off before they finished talking, and that you pushed back strongly when someone made a critical comment about the team's current culture.")
 - I is for Impact. Explain how their behaviour is impacting the thing they care about. (Eg "To create a culture where everyone belongs, you need to make space for others to speak, even if they are saying things you don't always agree with.")
 - N is for Next Steps. Clearly outline the behaviour that you'd like to see, from here on in. (Eg "For the rest of the session, I'd like you to let other people finish their points, and avoid debating the points that are raised.")

Good luck out there

Remember that most people are good, and most people are doing their best, including you!

While you play a key role in any team coaching session or workshop, you are only one person. So do your best to steer the conversation down a productive route, but don't be too hard on yourself if things go awry every now and then, as we say here at ICC: it's all part of the job!

Until next month.

The team at ICC Academy

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**diversity, equity
inclusion & belonging**

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2025 DATES FOR COACH TRAINING

FOUNDATION COACH CERTIFICATE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025
Module 1: 10th and 11th September	Module 1: 5th and 6th November
Module 2: 24th and 25th September	Module 2: 19th and 20th November
Module 3: 8th and 9th October	Module 3: 3rd and 4th December
Module 4: 22nd and 23rd October	Module 4: 17th and 18th December

TEAM COACHING CERTIFICATE

OCTOBER NOVEMBER 2025
Module 1: 28 and 29 October
Module 2: 11 and 12 November
Module 3: 25 and 26 November



ICC Academy

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