

People not contributing Video Transcript

- I'm always surprised that a person can go to a meeting and not say anything. I've usually got strong opinions that I want to get across or a strong feeling about the outcome that I want to get from the meeting. So I'm right in there taking more than my fair share if I can get it. But there are other people who dread the exposure of being at a meeting, who don't really want to talk if they can avoid it and who feel that they can just listen. And if they don't need to talk, then why should they? So, they could be good listeners and deep thinkers. Or, they could be people who don't really want to be there who are either shy or not interested in the subject or just lazy. In fact, it's hard to tell if they don't say anything. Does it matter if some people are quiet? My first instinct is it's great. More air time for me. But actually, of course, it's wasted potential. If they're quiet because they're listening and thinking, then we really should value their ideas and encourage them to contribute. Anyone, not just the leader, can ask a quiet person for their views. You can either just pick someone at random who hasn't said anything for a while or who you know will probably have something good to say on that particular subject. Or, you could go around the room and ask everyone for their views so each person has to talk without any individual feeling that they've been singled out and put on the spot. You could also appoint roles for people. For example, give someone the job of wearing the so-called black hat, which is the job of thinking about what could go wrong. What are the possible snags of the plan we're choosing? So they have permission to speak up and permission to be a bit cautious but negative at times. You could say, "Okay, Miles, you're the black hat-wearer for today. "Can you think of any snags with the plan?" And then it's over to them. And, more difficult and more subtle, it's important to have an atmosphere where people feel safe to make suggestions, where they can be open, where they won't be ridiculed or punished or just ignored when making a suggestion that others don't agree with. So, the meeting needs to be supportive and maybe a little bit informal in order to get this. And that's down to a skillful leader and the right mix of people at the meeting. Not easy.

So, do you have anyone at your meetings who's very quiet? And what are you going to do to encourage them to contribute more for the good of them, the meeting, and, ultimately, the organization? Use the notetaking tool to answer these questions.