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Tips for trainers
saboteur

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- **Purpose**

- To show how communication and group work can be easily disrupted;
- To create a group norm about sabotage and strategies to deal with it; and,
- As an energiser and equalizer.

- **Time**

15 minutes or longer, depending on the length of feedback.

- **Materials**

Groups of three chairs.

- **Steps to follow**

The participants are divided into groups of three. Each sub-group is divided into three roles: the speaker, the listener and the saboteur. The speaker and listener face each other to talk, while the saboteur can move. The speaker is asked to talk on any topic, possibly a problem, to the listener. The saboteur is asked to try to sabotage (i.e. disrupt) this conversation in any non-violent manner. Roaming saboteurs can move between groups; these may include the trainer plus any others who did not join groups when the full group was divided. After two minutes ask participants to change roles, and again after two more minutes, as it is essential for all participants to have the opportunity to play all three roles. Everybody should know what it feels like to be a saboteur and to be sabotaged.

- **Comments**

Discussion after this exercise is essential. To establish a group norm, it is necessary to get participants to reflect on how they felt.

> *"What was it like to be a saboteur or be sabotaged?"*
> *"Did you find it easy or difficult to disrupt the conversation?"*

Then ask everyone to call out the different types of saboteur and put these on a flipchart sheet. Examples include: interruptions with answers/questions, joking, rudeness, silent, taking over with enthusiasm and physical distraction by fidgeting.

Then ask the participants to reflect on ways to deal with such sabotage, i.e. *sabotaging the saboteurs.*

> *"How have you or could you deal with saboteurs?"*
> *"What are the ways groups can deal with saboteur individuals (outsiders or team members)?"*

Write these strategies on another sheet. Examples include:

- Ignore politely;
- Polite/clear interruption;
- Definite stopping of the interview;
- Talk it out (publicly or personally);
- Acknowledge and postpone;
- Divert attention (form subgroups or set task);
- Use saboteur for debate;
- Ask others for help; and,
- Simply allow it.

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These can be stuck to the wall for all to see and can be referred to during the rest of the workshop.

This exercise and discussion may be particularly useful if there are particularly disruptive group members. Such an exercise may be an opportunity for them to reflect on their behaviour and for the group to develop ways of dealing with the disruption. It can also prepare the group well for potentially difficult interviewing situations in the field.

More important, though, it introduces the notion of sabotage to the whole group, as well as focuses on strategies to deal with it. During the rest of the workshop, the trainer can guarantee that participants will self-regulate without any trainer input needed. Any group interruption will be greeted by calls of '*Sabotage!*'.

- **Alan Margolis**, Hampstead Training.