



# LEADING IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

LEVEL 4 PROJECT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Introduction
3	Your Assignment
4	Assess Your Skills
5	Competencies
6	The Value of Preparation
7	Manage Your Initial Response
8	Identify Issues You Can Resolve
8	Stay Objective
9	Provide Support and Encouragement
10	Take Decisive Action
11	The Value of Past Experience
12	Flexibility and Resourcefulness
12	Review and Apply
13	Complete Your Assignment
14	Resources

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# INTRODUCTION



Difficulties can arise in any situation. From a small disruption, like a short delay in a presentation due to late arrivals, to a major crisis, such as a natural disaster that forces an event to be rescheduled, there are many ways to address challenges. At the core of a strong leader is the ability to build skills that support resolving difficulties, small and large.

In this project, you will learn the fundamentals of managing difficult situations and how to apply these strategies to defuse tension and resolve challenges. You will recognize the importance of maintaining a positive attitude, even when facing a difficult change, and analyzing a situation to understand the reasons for challenges.

# YOUR ASSIGNMENT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to practice strategies for adjusting to unexpected changes to a finalized plan.

**Overview:** Design and complete a project plan for any event or set of goals. Your plan may be real or hypothetical. Add as many details to your plan as possible for the best success of this project. In a 5- to 7-minute speech at a club meeting, share your plan. Distribute copies of the Plan Disruption Ideas resource on page 23 to club members and allow them 2 to 3 minutes to discuss possible disruptions to your plan. Listen and present impromptu solutions to the disruptions introduced by club members. The total time to complete this assignment in a club meeting is 15 to 20 minutes.

**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 14.**

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Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

# ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

**5**  
EXEMPLARY

**4**  
EXCEL

**3**  
ACCOMPLISHED

**2**  
EMERGING

**1**  
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project	Statement	Post-Project
5 4 3 2 1	I can analyze a situation in order to understand the challenges that have occurred within the given circumstances.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I am resourceful, flexible, and positive when facing challenges.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I know strategies to apply when facing adversity.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I understand the value of a positive attitude when leading a team through a challenging situation.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5 4 3 2 1

# COMPETENCIES



**The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.**

- Analyze a situation to understand the reasons for challenges.
- Apply strategies for coping with a challenge.
- Demonstrate resourcefulness and flexibility when facing adversity.
- Maintain a positive attitude even when facing difficult situations.
- Recognize the impact of leadership style when dealing with a difficult situation.

# THE VALUE OF PREPARATION

It is the nature of leadership to be responsible for managing challenges when they arise in an organization. Though most leaders would choose to avoid challenges that lead to difficult situations, it is not always possible. There are times when even the most accomplished leader is faced with a situation where the only thing she can control is her response.

## PLANNING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

The most successful ventures are launched with a plan. Though this project does not specifically deal with creating a plan, it is important to touch on the impact of planning and organizing.



You may choose to create your plan, or an overview of your plan, with the Project Plan resource on page 19 or the Project Plan Overview resource on page 22. It may be helpful to share a copy of the completed Project Plan Overview with your club on the day of your presentation.

There are many types of leaders. They can range from a manager who plans every project down to the tiniest detail, to an individual whose only plan is to make sure a project is completed.

Though a spontaneous leader can be interesting and even entertaining to work with, the leader who takes the time to build a plan will often be the most successful. One of the greatest values of a well-organized plan is taking the opportunity to identify and assess risks.

Though no one can plan for every possible risk to an organization, taking time to put plans into place can help when the worst case scenario is realized. A prime example of the value of preparation is a well-organized evacuation plan in a building—it can literally save lives.

Planning for contingencies can help a leader evaluate possible challenges in a realistic way and build a system for responding. The value of preparing for challenges in advance is in providing an immediate or nearly immediate response should any occur. The longer it takes a leader to respond to a challenge, the more likely it is to escalate.

# MANAGE YOUR INITIAL RESPONSE

There are steps you can take at the onset of a challenge that will help you manage adversity. Consider the following when planning your initial response.

## Stay Calm

Panic is not your friend when facing adversity. Even if your natural, initial response is one of panic, you will only make the situation worse by losing your composure. Many times, maintaining your poise can be the most important step you take to keep a challenge from escalating into a crisis.

## Set the Tone

As a leader, you set the tone for the rest of your team. Be sure you are setting an effective tone that will serve all of you over an extended period. When you approach your team with a positive, constructive attitude, the members are likely to reflect it back to you.

## Take a Moment

Even during the most serious of challenges, taking time to compose yourself will serve you well. You may only have five minutes before you must address your team, but that time can help organize your thoughts.

## Review Your Plan

If you addressed the challenge in your initial planning, review your contingency plan. When you are facing a setback you had not considered, revisit your plans to assess if any responses apply to the current situation. At the very least, reviewing contingencies can connect you to your original thoughts on coping with challenges.

## Address Your Team

After you have taken the time to collect your thoughts and are prepared to address your team, start with what you know. Be sure any information you share is the most accurate you can acquire.

Sharing information too soon, or without total confidence that the information is correct, can create more problems than it solves. For example, if your challenge is caused by the late arrival of a speaker to a club sponsored event, you may or may not know the reason for the tardiness. You may have heard rumors about the reason for the late arrival, but don't have confirmation from the speaker.



## IDENTIFY ISSUES YOU CAN RESOLVE



When possible, solve issues that can be solved with the greatest positive impact on the overall challenge. In the example of the late speaker, you may have a team member who recently gave an excellent speech at your club. The team member could share that speech with the audience to fill the time while you wait for the scheduled speaker to arrive.

### DELEGATE TO TEAM MEMBERS

Though most challenges you face as a leader are not as straight forward as a late arrival, the same steps apply. Look for places where there is a problem you can solve and solve it.

Whenever possible, delegate responsibility to your team. Giving each team member the opportunity to be involved in the solution to your challenge will allow them to have a sense of ownership—not only in the problem, but in the solution.

### STAY OBJECTIVE

In the most difficult of situations, your team will look to you for guidance. In order to cope and to help your team cope, you must remain objective. Though it is important to demonstrate care and compassion, especially if your challenge affects many people, staying objective will keep your focus on the issues you have to overcome. Objectivity will also allow you to see what you can resolve and what needs further evaluation.

## **AVOID TAKING EVENTS OR DECISIONS PERSONALLY**

Regardless of how closely connected you are to a challenge, it is important to avoid personalizing adversity. Taking any problem personally makes it far more difficult to think through possible solutions in an objective way.

When you are required to abide by other's decisions, it is doubly important that your team sees you as a cooperative and stable leader. By maintaining objectivity, a leader is able to guide a team through challenges without falling into negative, unproductive conversations or behaviors.

Maintaining an objective perspective when coping with challenges also affects the way a leader addresses external stakeholders. Stakeholders who are removed from the immediate situation may still need to know about a challenge.

Some situations can be resolved with internal stakeholders, and the problem and solution shared with the external group after the fact. It may be possible to present the solution as a necessary change without disclosing the challenge that brought on the adjustment.

When sharing information with a stakeholder outside your closest team members, managing how you feel will allow you to state facts without escalating challenges or adding intensity. It is much more difficult to avoid escalating a difficult situation or placing blame when personal feelings are attached to a response.

## **PROVIDE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

Individuals respond differently to adversity. Acknowledging that each person affected by a challenge will respond in a way aligned with his or her personality will help you plan your immediate leadership strategy. Even if you are able to keep your reactions well under control, some members of your team may not.

A leader sets the tone, not only with his response to the initial challenge, but by helping team members cope in the aftermath.

Be available to hear concerns or productive feedback and address each honestly. Whenever possible, build an environment that fosters security even when circumstances are challenging. Team members will be far more likely to work to their highest potential and help a leader overcome adversity if they feel secure in their position.

## TAKE DECISIVE ACTION

Once your initial response to a challenge is complete, it is time to take a realistic look at long-term ramifications. In our Toastmasters event example, the immediate issue is resolved as soon as the time is filled with a club member speech and the late arriving special guest has made his or her presentation. It is likely that the completion of the event is not actually the end of the challenge or the response.

### CONFIDENT

Your most important tool when facing a challenge is confidence in your ability to lead. Once the initial response phase is over, your need for confidence and decisive action will not fade. Often, the hardest decisions and conversations happen after a challenge is managed.

### FEARLESS

Be fearless as you approach decisions. In the case of the Toastmasters event, several decisions may need to be made in the aftermath. For instance, the leader of the event may decide that the club will never again invite that particular guest. If the speaker was not responsible for the problem, but instead a team member provided wrong information, the leader may choose to lessen the responsibilities of the team member who didn't live up to his or her responsibilities.

### COURAGEOUS

These choices and conversations are not easy. However, making decisions and communicating them with courage and confidence will create an environment where even the most difficult can be assimilated effectively by your team.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Decisive action is the first hallmark of a confident leader. It follows that accountability is the second. When a leader confidently walks up to a lectern and announces that there has been a problem and it is someone else's fault, he or she loses credibility by the end of the sentence.

Accepting a leadership role is accepting responsibility for the results of that leadership, even when challenges happen that are out of your control. Honest assessment of the situation, direct answers to questions as they arise, admitting that you don't have all the answers if you don't, and following through with answers and decisions as soon as possible are the tools in a leader's tool kit for addressing challenge.

## THE VALUE OF PAST EXPERIENCE



Though you may not have faced a particular adversity in a leadership role, your past experience can still guide you. Look to experiences in your past that had a similar impact on you or the people around you. Use your understanding of those experiences to support your decisions. Even though earlier experiences may not be exactly the same, your successes or setbacks can help you address your current situation.

A sense of having lived through adversity in the past will help you to address issues and individuals with confidence in your abilities and decisions.

## FLEXIBILITY AND RESOURCEFULNESS



During challenging times, your ability to be flexible is one of your greatest assets. Flexibility allows you to see different approaches to a problem.

Opening a discussion with your team that encourages creative thinking when facing a challenge and supports all members in contributing to a solution is just one example of the possibility inherent in a leader's flexibility.

Resourcefulness is the capacity to look at challenges from every angle and draw solutions from unlikely places. For a leader, being resourceful and allowing team members to challenge themselves to find a solution to a problem can be the difference between finding a path to success and letting a project collapse.

Solutions can come from unexpected places when a leader is flexible and resourceful, and encourages these same behaviors in her team.

## REVIEW AND APPLY

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- How can you identify the best strategies for coping with a challenge?
- How can resourcefulness and flexibility help you when facing difficult situations?
- How can you find opportunity in challenges?
- What is the benefit of taking decisive action?
- What is the value of maintaining a positive attitude when facing difficult situations?

## COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT



Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

**Review:** Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

**Organize:** Use the Project Checklist on page 14 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment. Make copies of the Plan Disruption Ideas resource on page 23 for your club members.



**Schedule:** Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.

**Prepare:** Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 16–18 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.



# PROJECT CHECKLIST

## Leading in Difficult Situations

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to practice strategies for adjusting to unexpected changes to a finalized plan.

**Overview:** Design and complete a project plan for any event or set of goals. Your plan may be real or hypothetical. Add as many details to your plan as possible for the best success of this project. In a 5- to 7-minute speech at a club meeting, share your plan. Distribute copies of the Plan Disruption Ideas resource to club members and allow them 2 to 3 minutes to discuss possible disruptions to your plan. Listen and present impromptu solutions to the disruptions introduced by club members. The total time to complete this assignment in a club meeting is 15 to 20 minutes.

### This project includes:

- Designing a detailed project plan
- The Project Plan resource
- The Project Plan Overview resource
- The Plan Disruption Ideas resource
- A 5- to 7-minute speech to share your plan
- An impromptu speech to present solutions to disruptions

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Develop a plan for a real or hypothetical major event or communication.

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Schedule your speech with the vice president education.

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Write your speech. Be sure it includes a description of your plan.

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Rehearse your speech.

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Present your plan during your speech at a club meeting.

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Distribute the Plan Disruption Ideas resource to club members and allow them 2 to 3 minutes to brainstorm disruption ideas.

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Listen to club members' disruptions and present impromptu solutions to each. You must respond to at least three disruptions, but no more than five.

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After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

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Additional Notes

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# EVALUATION FORM

## Leading in Difficult Situations

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ **Speech Length:** 5- to 7-minute prepared speech  
AND 5 to 10 minutes for impromptu responses

**Speech Title** \_\_\_\_\_

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to practice strategies for adjusting to unexpected changes to a finalized plan.

### Notes for the Evaluator

The member completing this project has spent time developing a project plan for an event or set of goals.

About this speech:

- The first part of the member's speech will be a presentation of his or her plan. Your club members will then be invited to suggest disruptions to the plan.
- The member will need to address methods for managing the challenges presented by club members.
- There should be a minimum of three disruptions suggested and a maximum of five. The member may respond to each disruption separately.
- Evaluate the member on the first, prepared speech about their plan as well as the second, impromptu portion of the speech.
- As you evaluate consider the member's poise and presentation, as well as the viability and/or creativity of responses to the challenges.

### General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
<b>Clarity:</b> Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Vocal Variety:</b> Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Eye Contact:</b> Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Gestures:</b> Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Audience Awareness:</b> Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Comfort Level:</b> Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Topic:</b> Shares an organized plan					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Impromptu Speaking:</b> Formulates responses to challenges in a timely manner and is well-spoken					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Challenges:</b> Presents a viable solution for each challenge					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

## Leading in Difficult Situations

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

### Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

### Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

### Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

### Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

### Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs

- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

### Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

### Topic

- 5 – Shares a clearly defined, highly organized plan
- 4 – Shares a well-organized and thoughtful plan
- 3 – Shares an organized plan
- 2 – Presents a plan that is missing some key elements
- 1 – Presents a vague or poorly prepared plan

### Impromptu Speaking

- 5 – Appears comfortable, seamlessly responding to challenges with well-formulated answers
- 4 – Appears comfortable responding to challenges with well-formulated answers
- 3 – Formulates responses to challenges in a timely manner and is well-spoken
- 2 – Takes time to formulate responses to challenges, but sometimes creates awkward pauses
- 1 – Creates multiple awkward pauses by hesitating before responding to challenges, or fails to answer at all

### Challenges

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of responding to all challenges with viable solutions
- 4 – Sets an excellent example of responding to each challenge with a viable solution
- 3 – Presents a viable solution for each challenge
- 2 – Presents some viable solutions for challenges but may have struggled to address all challenges
- 1 – Presents few or no viable solutions for challenges

# PROJECT PLAN

## Project Plan

<b>Project</b>	
Purpose	
Resources	
Budget	
Key Deliverables	
Milestones	
Notes	

### Project Team

<b>Project Manager</b>	
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<b>Team Member</b>	
--------------------	--

Delegated Task	
Milestones	
Deadline	
Contact Information	

<b>Team Member</b>	
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Delegated Task	
Milestones	
Deadline	
Contact Information	

Team Member	
Delegated Task	
Milestones	
Deadline	
Contact Information	

Team Member	
Delegated Task	
Milestones	
Deadline	
Contact Information	

# PROJECT PLAN OVERVIEW

Project	
Purpose	
<b>Projected Team Members</b> Include number and any volunteers you know will be working with you.	
Resources	
Deliverables	
Milestones	

# PLAN DISRUPTION IDEAS

## Notes to the Speaker

Share this resource with your club members to help them identify disruptions to your plan. During this portion of your speech, you will be evaluated on your ability to give impromptu responses to disruptions. Though you may think through many of the scenarios listed on the resource, do not prepare your responses.

## Notes to Audience Members

This resource is designed to provide ideas for disruptions that could impact the speaker's plan. You are not required to use any of the disruptions on the list. Some may not apply to the speaker's plan, or you may have disruption ideas that are not included here. Be creative. The speaker's goal is to practice thinking of solutions quickly, as he or she would have to do if a challenge arose during the execution of the plan.

## Disruptions to an Event

- A guest speaker is late or is unable to attend at the last minute.
- A package containing handouts or other important resources does not arrive.
- The selected venue for an event is unavailable due to a natural disaster or other problem.
- There is a power outage during the event.
- Traffic or another unexpected problem delays many of the attendees, but not all.
- A surge in attendance on the day of the event is beyond what your venue can accommodate.
- An event occupying the same space as yours goes over time and you are unable to set up until your attendees have arrived.
- Your budget falls short of your plan.
- Your funds exceed your planned budget and you must decide how to enhance your event, making use of the funds in a way all or most of your attendees will appreciate.

## Disruptions to a Plan

- Life events alter your course, causing you to make changes to your plan. You:
  - Move to a new city
  - Marry or divorce
  - Experience a tragic loss
  - Receive an unexpected financial bonus or other windfall
  - Become ill or recover from a condition
  - Accept a new job or unexpected career opportunity
- Your budget falls short of your plan.
- Your funds exceed your planned budget or you reach the needed funds sooner than expected.
- Your vision shifts, broadening or narrowing, causing a needed deviation from the plan.
  - For example, the plan involves making time to write your memoir and steps for successfully publishing. Along the way, you write a novel that becomes a best-selling book, altering your vision for your future and your plan.





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