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# Curmudgeons in the Community College



# **Session on Curmudgeons**

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# Definition of a Curmudgeon

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- **Contrarians who think otherwise**
- **Cantankerous naysayers**
- **Self-appointed gadflies**
- **Quite vocal and opinionated**
- **Collaboration and civility not held in high esteem**
- **Prefer debate and circular discussion to solving problems and consensus**



# National Study

- **375 community college presidents**
- **77 respondents—20.5% return rate**

**97% indicated they had known a curmudgeon who fits the definition.**

**18% indicated they had known 10 or more.**



# Who Are the Curmudgeons?

How many are male?

**58%**

How many are female?

**2.5%**

**38% of respondents indicated males and females are equally represented.**



# Who Are the Curmudgeons?

**Classified Staff, Mid-Level Management,  
Executive Administrators, Student Services,  
Full-Time Faculty, Part-Time Faculty,  
Students, & Trustees**

<b>Full-Time Faculty</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Mid-Level Management</b>	<b>6.4%</b>
<b>Trustees</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>2.5%</b>



# Who Are the Curmudgeons?

Career & Technical Education, Community Services, Student Services, Library Services, Humanities & the Arts, Social Science, Mathematics, Other

Humanities & the Arts	27%
Social Science	27%
Other	16%
Career & Technical Ed.	6%
Mathematics	5%



# Study Phase Two

- The 77 respondents were invited to complete written answers to 4 questions.
- Twenty-two respondents did:
  - a. Behaviors
  - b. Motivation
  - c. Damage
  - d. Strategies to mitigate damage





# Impact on the College

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**86% of the respondents indicated that the impact on the college of curmudgeons they had known was either negative (49%) or highly negative (36%)**



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Slow or Stop Change

- *They undermine efforts to implement innovative programs and processes.*
- *They slow down decision making.*
- *Everything takes longer, and frustration rates are higher.*
- *They have highly negative impact on institutional morale.*



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Create an Unhealthy Environment

- *They can be a thorn in the side of the college for years.*
- *He changed the dynamics and positive atmosphere of the college.*
- *They created an unhealthy culture that has taken years to repair—after they retired.*



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Undermine Mutual Respect & Trust

- *They tend to intimidate new or less vocal faculty.*
- *They love to create and spread rumors about administrators.*
- *I was amazed at the level of disinformation and chaos they could create.*



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Create Adversarial Relationships

- *Their behavior encourages people to take sides.*
- *They are so nasty other faculty are afraid to confront them.*
- *Faculty quit attending senate meetings because of their outbursts.*
- *An insidious cancer eating away at our efforts to change and improve.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

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## Connect Personally

- *I usually win them over by respecting their positions and following through on what I promise.*
- *Nothing I or others have tried works because curmudgeons do not want to help; they only want to disrupt and destroy.*
- *His browbeating trumps my attempts.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Isolate the Curmudgeons

- *Physically relocate them and limit access to others.*
- *Focus on their negative impact on students and the college.*
- *As more faculty took ownership of our initiatives they began to take a stand, and they isolated the curmudgeons.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Create an Inclusive Culture

- *Create structures for ideas to come from any level of the organization.*
- *Invest heavily in staff development.*
- *Kill them with data.*
- *Institute governance structures that include all groups—make it harder for curmudgeons to just attack the president.*





# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Ensure Transparency

- *The best antiseptic for a lie is to shine a light on it.*
- *The more transparent the organization, the less credibility curmudgeons will have.*
- *With my trustee curmudgeon I shared every communication and request from any trustee with all trustees.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Invest in the Change Agents

- *Support the change agents with promotions, special assignments, and professional development.*
- *Invest heavily in orientation and mentoring of new employees.*
- *Use the 90—10 rule. If less than 10% participate make the incentives so attractive they wish they had.*



# Barriers to Change

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**Curmudgeons are barriers to change and innovation:**

**Curmudgeons slow change.**

**Curmudgeons resist change.**

**Curmudgeons fear change.**



# Community College Curmudgeons



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