Working Effectively with Exceptionally Challenging Behaviors, Part Seven

By Diana Leafe Christian

Whole communities can address these behaviors and protect their community.

Otter John McBride

"Hello," Anna begins with trepidation. She's just knocked on the door of a community member I'll call Mavis, known in her community for sometimes being overbearing and harsh yet apparently unable to tolerate attempts to give her feedback (see the first article in the series, Communities #193). In a meeting the younger people once organized to ask her to behave more kindly and cooperatively with them, Mavis commandeered the meeting and threatened anyone who'd dare to give her critical feedback that night. So, no one did offer feedback, apparently so intimidated by her fierce admonitions that they could only look down at the floor and tear up their rapidly written lists of concerns.

"I'm here from the Community Care Team," Anna continues. "May I come in?"

"What's this about?" Mavis asks as Anna steps inside.

Anna takes a deep breath. "Well, first, the Care Team would like to ask you if you've been having any difficulties lately, and if you'd like any kind of support from the community."

Mavis is surprised, touched by their concern.

"And second," Anna continues nervously, "We'd like to ask you to please consider changing some of the ways you're relating with other community members lately. There isn't any easy way to say this, but some people have expressed their concerns to us about things you've said to them lately, and the way you've said them."

"What?!" exclaims Mavis. "*Who? Who* says this?!"

Anna gulps. "Just some people who talked to us; doesn't matter who. So you see we first wanted to ask you what's going on. Have some things been especially stressful lately? Do you need any kind of help? And we'd like to offer support in helping you perhaps phrase things differently; um...more respectfully, when you talk to people. We think maybe you might be under a lot of stress lately and it might come out this way towards others. Has it?"

Mavis scowls.

Anna takes another deep breath. "And we want to ask if we can help. And I've been asked to tell you, from the Care Team, this is the first consequence in our new 'Graduated Series of Consequences' process."[1]

Mavis is incensed. She feels defensive, blindsided. How dare Anna come to her door like this! How dare the Care Team focus on her! She never wanted the community to adopt the damn new graduated series feedback process in the first place. And here it is, with the first consequence in the new process being applied to her! To *her!*

Anna doesn't feel great either. She's not comfortable saying something to a friend or neighbor which she knows could upset them if they misinterpreted it as a personal attack. Yet if the community's Care Team *doesn't* take some action, if it doesn't set limits and boundaries for Mavis, she'll likely continue intimidating people and discouraging them from wanting to attend meetings and gatherings when she'll be present. Because, from Mavis's point of view, why *should* she change anything, given that she believes the way she communicates is perfectly acceptable? It's those other people who just need to be straightened out sometimes!

With no official feedback and request for change from the whole community, it's easy for Mavis and people with challenging behaviors like hers to ignore or even punish the individual community members who try to give feedback or request a behavior change, or who outright avoid her. So an official request from the community like this, with a multi-step process of ever-greater potential consequences that all community members know well, *could* induce someone like Mavis to change her ways

and become more cooperative.

Unfortunately this is only a simulated conversation; Mavis's community didn't actually approach her with any kind of Graduated Series of Consequences. However, this scenario can illustrate the Catch-22 dilemma a community can face when its members are brave enough to create a series of limits and boundaries for the Mavises in their midst.

The Catch-22 of Communities Dealing with These Behaviors

And it really is a dilemma. If a group doesn't use a method involving consequences like this, it's likely the person will continue their hurtful, disruptive behaviors, with community members feeling increasingly upset or fearful. Some won't want to attend meetings anymore and will try to avoid the person whenever they can. Some might even leave the community altogether—and this has happened in some groups. But if the community *does* use a process like some form of graduated consequences, there's a chance the person will comply. If so, community members can feel emotionally safe again and attend meetings and social gatherings again.

The Graduated Series of Consequences process is a series of respectful yet increasingly potent experiences of peer pressure on people who violate community agreements or exhibit especially challenging behaviors. It allows their actions and the community's consequences to be known by an ever-increasing number of community members. Most people want others to think well of them, so a series of consequences that increase the amount of *public* attention on them—which I call the "Community Eye"—tends to induce those who break agreements or exhibit these behaviors to again comply with community agreements and/or behave more cooperatively. This process is for members who *consistently* rather than occasionally break agreements, or who exhibit consistent, persistent behaviors that disrupt meetings or harm or demoralize other members or the group.

However, conveying each consequence to the person, even the relatively mild consequence of a first step as demonstrated in the scenario with Anna and Mavis, isn't always easy, since people with these behaviors typically cannot tolerate any kind of critical feedback. And the fiercer and more egregious someone's behaviors, the more difficult they are to challenge. It takes courage! Yet a method like this *is* an effective way for the community as a whole (as compared to individual members or groups of members) to protect itself and its members from someone who consistently and frequently says and does things that reduce community well-being.

What Are "Especially Challenging Behaviors"?

As described in previous articles, "especially challenging behaviors" are what psychologists call "narcissistic" attitudes and behaviors. These are not the occasional behaviors that many of us express sometimes, but behaviors that recur frequently, like those of Dwight: contemptuous and disdainful, lying, and behaving ruthlessly towards others (described in the first article); Griswald: self-focused, lacking empathy, and expressing rage, hostility, and even taking revenge in the group (second article); Eldred: resentful, easily outraged, and willing to nurse a grudge for years (third article); Andraste: hostile and contemptuous towards those she

looked down on (fourth article); Hugo and Umberto: manipulative and passive-aggressive, and seeking out the most vulnerable, self-doubting fellow community members to become their loyal followers (fifth article); and Olive, aggressive in meetings while believing herself victimized, and demanding whole-group meetings to deal with her many upsets about community decisions (fourth and sixth articles). (See sidebar, "Especially Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors," p. 38.)

Because most community members *don't* exhibit these behaviors, it can be jarring and disorienting when we do see them in our group. However, when one or more of our fellow community members consistently and frequently act out these behaviors it can have a devastating effect on the rest of us, and on our whole group. These challenging behaviors can cause so much conflict, and dealing with them can consume so many hours of process time in meetings and in mediations, that they drain and exhaust the group. Our community can become so toxic, in fact, the less patient people—sometimes also the most responsible and competent people in the group—can stop participating in meetings, stop going to social events, and possibly even leave the group entirely.

This article series advocates that we learn to recognize this pattern of behaviors and learn as much as we can about them so that, if possible, we can not only feel understanding and compassion for someone who acts in these ways (while *lowering* our expectations that the person will change and become empathetic or interested in others), but also set clear limits and boundaries to protect ourselves.

Previous articles focused on what individual community members as well as groups of members can do to protect themselves and their communities (articles one through five). The sixth article and this one focus on and what whole communities can do to protect themselves.

A Graduated Series of Consequences

Adopting a "Graduated Series of Consequences" helps encourage accountability in the group—*not* by punitive measures or fines, or shaming or blaming—but through a series of fair,

The Graduated Series of Consequences method is how whole communities can set limits and boundaries on these behaviors.

Mikail Duran

These behaviors can be characterized by an obvious or covert (even subtle) attitude of arrogance, entitlement, and a lack of empathy for others.

Detail from Ivan Kramskroi, Portrait of an Unknown Woman

compassionate, incremental consequences, from mild to increasingly serious, which treat the person respectfully while also asking them to make changes and resolve the problem. It *is* possible to ask community members to follow agreements and say, "Please don't do that anymore," in ways that are direct, emotionally authentic, and respectful of the person's dignity. And if after the first several consequences are applied the person still doesn't comply, the last-resort consequence can be that the person is asked to leave the community. A Graduated Series of Consequences is essentially just a way to set limits and boundaries with the person.

A group could create its own kinds of consequences and a different number of steps as it saw fit. However, here's an example of one way a group could do this:

• **First Consequence:** One community member asks the person violating an agreement or behaving hurtfully to comply with the agreement again, or behave in a more cooperative manner.

• **Second Consequence:** If the person continues to break the agreement (or do undesirable behaviors), a small group, perhaps three or four people, visits them to request this again.

• **Third Consequence:** If this still doesn't resolve the problem, the community creates an informal written contract asking them a third time to stop the behavior. The contract outlines how in several steps over the next few months the person will resolve the issue, with periodic meetings with one or more other community members to help the person stay on track and abide with the contracted steps to resolve the issue.

• **Fourth Consequence:** If the issue is still not resolved, the group holds a community meeting about the issue. Each participant shares how the person's *not* keeping the agreement or behaving in challenging ways has affected them, and perhaps also shares the feelings their behaviors have triggered in them: dismay, confusion, anger, etc. The person can also tell the group what's been going on with them, if there have been circumstances that diminished their ability to keep agreements or if their life has been especially stressful lately. At this point the person is put on "membership probation": if they continue to not comply with the community agreement or they don't stop the undesirable behavior by a certain date (which could be in just a few days), the community will deliver the fifth consequence. If the person doesn't attend the meeting, it is still held for the benefit of everyone else, and the person is given written notes from or an audio or video recording of the meeting.

• **Fifth Consequence:** If the person still hasn't resolved the prob-

lem by the given date, then, in the final, "last resort" consequence, their community membership is revoked and they're asked to leave the group.[2] This is a drastic move; however, if the violation is severe enough or the conflict too wrenching, and if it's gone on long enough with no resolution, the group needs to get realistic. Sometimes increasingly public consequences are the only way to protect the community from the devastatingly low morale that can occur with serious violations of agreements or when someone exhibits especially challenging behaviors that they cannot or will not stop.

Because these requests are repeated, and everyone knows that the consequences—the "Community Eye"—will be increasingly public and unpleasant for the person, this method utilizes both a "carrot" (the consequences will stop if they change their behavior) and a "stick" (but the consequences will continue if the person doesn't change their ways), this definitely serves as limits and boundaries on the person's behavior.

Why This Works

You may believe this method is effective because each consequence in the series is more visible and impactful than the last, and people want to avoid the next, more potent consequence. But a more subtle reason this works is that this method simply *exists.* Knowing that their community has a Graduated Series of Consequences process can deter people from breaking agreements or treating others badly. People don't *want* to get a knock at the door from someone who'll ask them to change, much less find three or four people at their door. And they sure don't want a whole community meeting called about their behavior!

Strangely enough, after a community adopts a process like this they often don't ever have to use it. I think it's because everyone knowing these consequences exist tends to motivate people to keep their agreements and "step up" to better, "community-trained" behavior.

Or maybe the community only has to apply the first, relatively mild consequence, and perhaps with only one or two members, for everyone to behave better from then on. This has happened several times in my community. The knowledge that we now have a method of ever-increasing community visibility and peer pressure serves as an effective deterrent. After the first or at most two consequences are applied to someone, or to two or three members, amazingly, from then on almost everyone honors the group's agreements and behaves considerably more decently.

The Smart, Compassionate Way Heart-Culture Farm Deals with These Behaviors

"At Heart-Culture Farm Community (near Eugene, Oregon) we

> ## People with these behaviors typically cannot tolerate any kind of critical feedback.

have experienced several residents over the past two decades who exhibited some version of the behaviors described in these articles," observes Kara Huntermoon (Letters, COMMUNITIES #198). Several community members—valued members of her group—left because they couldn't take the challenging behaviors anymore.

Unfortunately, one or more people with these kinds of behaviors can be so painful and difficult that beloved members flee the scene—prioritizing their own emotional safety and peace of mind more than sticking it out in a community that now feels toxic and painful. Community can be wonderful, but with behaviors like this in the group, it can become a living hell. No wonder people leave!

So Heart-Culture Farm members decided to face this problem head on, crafting a whole-community response when one or more individual community members call attention to someone consistently exhibiting behaviors like this. "Our community first tries all our skills to help someone have the container they need for personal growth and healing," Kara notes. And only if and when this doesn't work, do community members ask the community to take action to set limits and boundaries on the person with the behaviors, and this can include eventually asking them to leave the group.

Heart-Culture Farm's five-step method can be especially helpful when one or more members are being personally targeted by someone with these behaviors. "Targeting" is described in the third article, such as when Eldred targeted Joseph, and the fourth article, when Olive and Andraste each targeted me. Here is the guidance they came up with for those who are strongly impacted:

1. Ask other community residents for help. Especially ask full members and those who've lived there the longest, not only because they'll have more clout in the group than newer members but also they'll likely have a greater interest in maintaining community stability.

2. Take time for self-reflection and your own personal healing. This is similar to past articles' advice for those of us most affected by these behaviors, especially when we've been targeted, to get what I call "outside healing help" to shore up our own inner reserves of strength and emotional resilience. We can't change the person's behaviors, but we can certainly make ourselves less vulnerable to them.

3. Try addressing the issues with them directly. This is similar to the advice to set limits and boundaries with the person, described in the first through and fourth articles. You can set limits and boundaries by telling the whole group what you'll do if someone behaves in certain ways in meetings, the step Joseph took with Eldred, or telling the person directly what you do and don't want from them, as Rose did with Dwight and as Joseph later did with Eldred, or through the quiet (or "chicken") method of just quietly staying out of the person's way and out of their line of sight, as I did with Olive. You can also do it by creating Connection Contracts (see below). If setting limits and boundaries one-one-one doesn't work and the person continues the behaviors at Heart-Culture Farm, they suggest asking a third person to join the first person in asking again for change. If even that doesn't work, they suggest arranging an all-community meeting and mediation on the topic. As you may recall from previous articles, requests for change and mediations usually don't work with people who exhibit these behav-

iors. And while Heart-Culture members know this, they still give the person every benefit of the doubt and try these measures first. They want to give the person every chance to turn their behaviors around before they apply the next consequence.

4. Time, and Evidence. A community, and especially its founders and long-term members, says Kara, need both time and evidence before they can determine that a community member has persistent challenging behaviors. *Time* is required to try various community processes over the weeks and months and see whether they've made any difference or not. *Evidence* comes from community members sharing their struggles and what happened when they tried various ways to resolve the conflicts triggered by these members' challenging behaviors. Both are needed before the community may be ready to take the fifth and final step.

5. Tell the community the behaviors have become so challenging you're thinking of leaving. Ask for their help. In this fifth step, the person who has initiated this series of steps tells Heart-Culture Farm's leadership that dealing with these behaviors over time and not seeing any change in the person or their behaviors no matter what they've tried has become so difficult for them, so intolerable, that they're considering leaving the community for good. "Telling the leadership" could mean telling everyone this and asking for help in a whole-group meeting—saying you don't *want* to leave the community and asking the group for help. Or, depending on the kind of governance structure your community has, you could tell the steering committee or administrative team, as members of my community did when asking our leadership team to *please do something* about Olive's behavior in meetings (fifth article). This last step can and perhaps *should* include asking the person with the challenging behaviors to leave the community.

While this may seem like a radical idea and "*not* community!" to some, for others it's a no-brainer. *Of course*, after first trying everything else, a community should ask anyone with these kinds of especially challenging behaviors to leave, rather than letting them drive many of *us* out of the community!

Your community and mine—all our communities—can create multi-step processes like Heart-Culture's five-step method to induce better behavior in our members. This is another form of a Graduated Series of Consequences. However, it includes the powerful message to the community that when the situation becomes so bad for you and perhaps others that you're considering leaving the community altogether, then you can legitimately ask the community to set limits and boundaries on the person's behavior, or even to ask them to leave.

> ## The message—"It's gotten so bad I'm thinking of leaving"—*can* get your community's attention!

The message—"It's gotten so bad I'm thinking of leaving"—*can* get your community's attention!

Dr. Craig Malkin's "Connection Contracts"

Psychologist Dr. Craig Malkin, author of *Rethinking Narcissism,* suggests offering what he calls informal "Connection Contracts" to courteously yet effectively set limits and boundaries with people who exhibit these challenging behaviors, while attempting to elicit more cooperation from them.

Like most psychologists and others who counsel clients who are regularly in contact with people with these behaviors, Dr. Malkin recommends limiting contact with them when possible. But if the person is a family member or partner—or a fellow community member—you can't easily do this. So for him, working effectively with these behaviors requires managing how the person treats you and protecting yourself from their behaviors—*not* trying to induce more closeness and mutual cooperation them—while at the same time offering the person every opportunity to take the higher road.

Dr. Malkin created the Connection Contracts method for individuals to protect themselves. In a Connection Contract "you state clearly and simply what has to happen if the person wants you present," he writes. "It's a way of setting limits by providing rules and expectations." Here are examples of how an individual community member can offer a Connection Contract to someone they're interacting with in their community:

• "I'm not comfortable with yelling and criticism. If I hear either in our Finance Committee meeting today, I'll leave the meeting. I'd like to hear your thoughts about this Finance Committee project, but it'll be up to you whether or not I'm able to stay in our meeting as we planned."

• "We need to stay focused on planning our Fall Celebration. I'm happy to have our planning meeting tomorrow as you suggest, but if I hear accusations, blame, or other attacks, I'll take that to mean you're not able to have the conversation right then and we'll have to come back to it later."

• "We need to talk about the cleaning schedule for the shared kitchen. If our talk becomes a list of what you think are my problems, or what you see as wrong with me, that will show me that you're not ready to make the cleaning schedule yet and we'll set it aside and take it up again at another time."

"The goal of a Connection Contract is to explain which behaviors will end the conversation," Dr. Malkin writes. The emphasis is on what will keep you present in the meeting, or keep the community wanting the person present in a meeting, not what will make you or the community happy.

And while it can work well to offer a Connection Contract to an individual community member, it can also work well if the whole community offers a Connection Contract to an individual member. First the community would need to agree to use this method, which ideally would be conveyed by the facilitator of a committee meeting or a whole-community meeting, and ideally convey privately, before the meeting. Some examples:

• "Our Finance Committee is not comfortable with yelling and criticism. If we hear either, as today's meeting facilitator I'll ask you to leave the meeting. We'd like to hear your ideas about this project, but it'll be up to you whether or not you're able to stay in our meeting today."

• "We need to stay focused on planning the Fall Celebration in our community business meeting today. However, as today's meeting facilitator, if I hear accusations, blame, or other attacks, I'll take that to mean you're not able to participate in this discussion today, and I'll ask you to either not contribute to the conversation anymore or else leave the meeting. If that happens, we'll have to get your ideas for the Fall celebration later, outside the meeting."

• "We need to talk about the cleaning schedule for our community kitchen in today's business meeting. If in our discussion we hear a list of what you think are the problems of any other community members re. kitchen cleanliness, or what you see as being wrong with them, that will show me as meeting facilitator that you're not ready to help determine the cleaning schedule yet. If so I'll ask you to either not contribute to the conversation anymore or else leave the meeting. If that happens, you won't be able to contribute your ideas to the kitchen cleaning schedule today, but will be able to read about the new schedule in the minutes."

In these examples the individual person speaking, or the meeting facilitator, doesn't put down or criticize the other person; they simply state what they don't want to experience and what they'll do if it occurs. This is similar to how Rose told her whole community (first article) and Eldred told his (third article) what kinds of meeting behaviors they wouldn't tolerate in meetings and if these behaviors still occurred, they'd leave the meeting.

What research about narcissistic behaviors demonstrates, Dr. Malkin notes, is that people only move toward more cooperative behavior when they're reminded of the importance of their relationships, and for us, the importance of their relationship with their community and their fellow members. Change doesn't come from telling people off or accusing them of being too self-centered, ruthless, or manipulative, Dr. Malkin says. Change occurs "by showing them the benefits of collaboration and understanding." In the above examples, the benefits are to stay included in the conversation or to continue participating in the meeting.

Connection Contracts could of course be used with a Graduated Series of Consequences or another multi-step process like the one Heart-Culture Farm uses.

Switching from Consensus to Sociocracy to Reduce Challenging Behaviors

This is another way a community can reduce the effects of these behaviors on community. Sociocracy is an especially effective self-governance and decision-making method I now highly recommend for communities instead of traditional consensus.

We've seen how communities can change their decision-making method from classic consensus to a modified form of consensus as a way to help limit these behaviors in meetings, especially when the people exhibiting the behaviors are the community's most frequent blockers (sixth article). While Sociocracy can also help reduce hurtful or disruptive behaviors in meetings, it can help curb these behaviors in other contexts as well:

• People can't dominate meetings by speaking more often than others, because the facilitator calls on people in rounds. So no one can speak more often than anyone else, and no one is ignored either. Everyone gets a turn to speak.

• No one can derail meetings by initiating long discussions without first getting consent from everyone else in the meeting. Further, discussions are consented to for a certain pre-determined amount of time. The meeting facilitator literally times all agreed-upon discussions with a timer, and when the time's up the discussion stops. If people want to continue a discussion, they need consent from everyone else to extend the discussion, and again, for a certain, agreed-upon length of time. For this reason in Sociocracy people can't "hijack the meeting" or derail the agenda by generating unexpected discussions that go on and on.

• Group members can't join any committee they like, but must ask the committee's existing members if they can join. The committee can say "Yes" if they need more members at that time or if they'd like the person to join them, or "No, thank you" if they don't currently need more committee members. They can also decline someone's request to join their committee if the person has a history of behaviors that trigger conflict or otherwise disrupt meetings (like Olive, Griswald, Hugo, Umberto, Ethel, and others described in previous articles).

• Sociocracy has a method for fairly and transparently selecting people for roles in a committee or in the whole group, based solely on whether or not the person meets the requirements to perform the tasks and duties of the role, rather than on how popular they are.

• Each role has a specific term length, so no one can fill a role indefinitely. This means more people can fill more roles in a community. This can deter cliques from commandeering community leadership.

• Sociocracy has another process for helping people improve in how they perform their roles, with positive, good-will feedback about what's been working well during their time in the role, and what may need improvement, if anything.

• As a last resort, Sociocracy has a formal, step-by-step process for removing someone from a committee if they tend to trigger conflict in the committee or are disruptive in some way or otherwise hamper its ability to carry out its work. (This is only about removing someone from a committee, not evicting someone from the whole group.) I know of two communities who adopted Sociocracy solely so they could remove an egregiously disruptive member from various committees.

However, these Sociocracy processes only help curtail disruptive behaviors in *meetings;* they don't help deter challenging behaviors in shared meals or other social gatherings or when meeting the person in the community garden or the laundry room. But of course a community can always create a committee that specifically deals with conflicts in the group and which encourages community members to behave more cooperatively.

Using Partial, Modified, or "Sort of" Sociocracy Doesn't Work

However, from visiting and interviewing people in communities and member-led groups that use Sociocracy—or believe they're using it—I've learned that attempting to use Sociocracy doesn't always help.

When a group uses Sociocracy partially or uses it incorrectly, which many groups do, it not only doesn't curb these challenging behaviors but can result in confusion and conflict in the group. In my experience teaching Sociocracy to communities for many years now, *unless* the group fulfils what I call "the four necessary conditions" for using Sociocracy effectively they tend not to experience these benefits. The four conditions are: (1) the community members invest enough time and energy to learn Sociocracy accurately and use it effectively, (2) all community members, not just some, learn it, (3) they use it as it was designed, rather than combining it with various aspects of consensus or voting, and (4) they get periodic review trainings, or get help from their Sociocracy trainer when they have questions or run into problems, to stay on track and prevent "governance drift" back towards consensus or voting.

When communities use only a partial version of Sociocracy, or only some members understand it but not others, or if the group has significantly changed Sociocracy or combined it with consensus, in my experience it not only doesn't work well but actually can cause *more* conflict in the group. If so, the people who exhibit especially challenging behaviors can continue to disrupt meetings and get away with it.

Shifting from classic consensus to Sociocracy is like trying to learn another language. Just as one needs at least a minimum of understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to just be understood and talk with native speakers in even a rudimentary way, learning Sociocracy requires really learning all of what I call its "seven parts." Trying to use Sociocracy partially or with only half the group understanding it (or *mis*understanding it) can be so disruptive it makes everything worse. So if a group wants to help reduce especially challenging behaviors in meetings but isn't interested in investing enough time in learn-

Whether the Many Raindrops Make a Flood Method is used by whole communities or groups of community friends, it tends to work well.

Nick Nice

Some communities switch to using Sociocratic self-governance to reduce these especially challenging behaviors in their meetings.
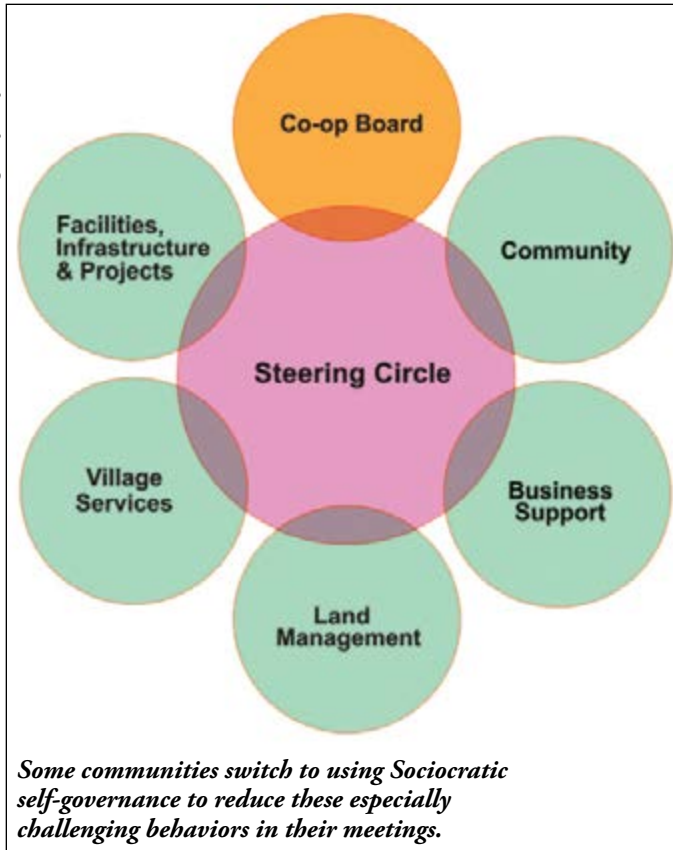
ing Sociocracy, I recommend using the N St. Method instead. This method (described in the sixth article) is much easier and far less time-consuming to learn and adopt if a group already knows consensus.

One way or another, replacing classic, traditional consensus with either Sociocracy or the N St. Method, or another version of modified consensus, can really help a group reduce the effects of challenging behaviors, at least in meetings.

The "Many Raindrops Make a Flood" Method

This is potentially the most controversial of these whole-community methods to reduce challenging behaviors in the group. It's controversial because people agree in advance to always give the person feedback soon after they're seen exhibiting these behaviors, and this can be misinterpreted as a manipulation or "ganging up on" someone. However, we could see this as the famous half-full glass of lemonade. Looked at in this light, the Many Raindrops method could be seen as an effective way to gently give the person many chances to improve their way of relating to others. A method this gentle, respectful, and repetitive might induce the person to change their ways. Or more likely—and this part can be seen as controversial also—employing the Many Raindrops method can feel like the last straw to the person, the straw that induces them to feel so frustrated by all the feedback and requests for change they just pack their bags and leave. (This actually can be a good thing.) The Many Raindrops method can be carried out by the whole community or by a group of friends in community acting together to try to protect themselves from someone acting in these ways, and can help the community, as we saw in the fifth article when groups of friends in community

created support networks, alliances, or petitions.

Using the Many Raindrops technique offers feedback to someone with these behaviors that they cannot ignore or dismiss. The intention behind this method is to motivate people to change their behavior, and if possible, become more self-aware. However, as with the whole group using Connection Contracts, or any series of steps or consequences—or changing the whole governance system!—employing this method means agreeing to it as a group and planning a raindrops campaign ahead of time in the group.

Here's how it works. If you feel upset, or even just turned off by something a person with these behaviors recently did or said to you, or to another person, you briefly tell the person what they said or did that concerns you, and ideally, also how it affected you. If you feel up to it, you also request briefly that they not do this again. If you know Nonviolent Communication and can frame your comments in terms of your feelings and unmet needs, it will be easier for them to hear. And it won't just be you offering this feedback, but everyone who has agreed in advance to do this.

The behavior you comment on needs to be recent, not in the past, so the feedback will be specific and will occur fairly soon after the person did it. In giving the feedback, *don't* bring up past actions they may have done, at least not right then (save that for a community process circle). The encounter is purposely *brief*—just one gentle raindrop—not a long, convoluted explanation, justification, or rant. Each person offering their gentle raindrop of feedback says just a sentence or two, then lets it go. You're offering just one gentle raindrop, not pouring a bucket of water on their head.

Of course the person may be upset, or angry. They may say something to retaliate. "No, that's what *you* do!" "Well, that's only *your* opinion." "I'm sorry you *feel* that way!" (Do not add that other community members think so to.) Make the raindrop *only* from your point of view. Be vigilant against getting sucked into a long-winded, no-win conversation with the person, which can be like a black hole, like quicksand. Just say your piece and stop. Resist their efforts to instigate an unwanted conversation about your feedback. Be courteous, and leave the scene if you have to.

Some people offering the feedback may be so fed up with the person's behavior they can't bring themselves to speak respectfully, and so may use shaming or blaming. They may say things

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like, "You always do that; what's wrong with you!?" or "Damn it, you did it again, I can't stand it!" Ideally this won't happen; ideally the many raindrops of feedback will be courteous and respectful.

Whether or not all the comments are respectful, these many raindrops of feedback and requests falling on the person's psyche can start to feel like a flood after a while. Receiving a flood of feedback can help them see—in ways they simply cannot ignore—that they frequently and consistently do and say things other people don't enjoy. Ideally they also hear how these behaviors negatively affect other people, and what other people would like them to do differently. Community consultant Kavana Tree Bressen (*effective-collective.net*), who has also observed this dynamic in communities, once told me she believes it takes at least three different people offering the person this kind of feedback before it sinks in deeply enough so the person can really take it in. I've found this as well.

The person *may* merely feel dismayed, and regretful, and motivated to change. Their emotional discomfort *could* induce them to look more deeply at themselves, understand how other people feel when they act these ways, and decide to change—and even to get outside help to heal their issues and change behaviors. If so, both the person and the community will benefit enormously. The group can benefit from all of the person's positive qualities and contributions without also experiencing their hurtful or disruptive behaviors, or at least not as often.

But...given what we've learned about the beliefs and attitudes of most people with these behaviors, most of them will interpret the many raindrop-requests, no matter how gently they're offered, as hurtful and abusive, and as the community "ganging up on them." If you recall the description of the early emotional trauma experienced by people with these behaviors (second article), their inner distress and trauma is painfully triggered—their cage rattled—when someone even gently

Especially Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors

More Obvious, Overt, Extroverted Behaviors (Grandiosity on the outside, insecurity on the inside)	***Less Obvious, Covert, Introverted Behaviors:*** (Insecurity on the outside, grandiosity on the inside)
Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness	Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Entitlement	Impaired empathy
Impaired empathy	Relishing vengeance
Lying; exaggerating accomplishments	Manipulating others; using people
Rapidly escalating anger; sudden angry outbursts	Hypersensitivity to criticism
Grandiosity	Projecting their behaviors and attitudes onto others
Craving attention	"Gaslighting" others (telling someone what they directly observed didn't actually happen)
Criticizing others	Envying others; resenting others
Mocking or jeering at others	Limited self-awareness
Invalidating, demeaning, or belittling others	"Grooming" newer or less confident members to be their allies and support their version of reality
Bullying others	

comments on their behavior or asks them to change. The person will probably experience the comments or requests as attacks. Because they don't realize that the pain they feel from these requests arises from their own suppressed emotional pain and fear, they tend to believe the person offering the raindrop is *causing* their inner emotional pain. Their emotional pain, triggered but not caused by the many instances of gentle feedback, can be so intolerable they can't bear it and flee.

I first saw this dynamic happen naturally and spontaneously when various people decided to offer feedback and request changes to someone in a nonprofit organization. Later I learned of or directly witnessed this method happening spontaneously in three different intentional communities, including mine. In each case the person left the group, and oddly enough, each time the person said almost verbatim the same angry, blaming phrase, "I'm not gonna *take* this sh** anymore!"

If, however, the person can tolerate the feedback, remains in the community, and becomes more helpful and cooperative, this is wonderful. Mission accomplished! But with these kinds of behaviors, it's more likely the person will just up and leave. Most people will probably feel *relieved,* with the group experiencing a sudden increase of harmony and good will.

Coming Up

In the next article, the eighth and last in the series, we'll learn why more communities don't take measures like these to set limits and boundaries on these behaviors—stopped by one or more members taking the "Rescuer" role in what's called the Karpman Drama Triangle...and what the group can do about it. ❧

Diana Leafe Christian, author of Creating a Life Together *and* Finding Community, *speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops and online trainings on creating successful new communities, and on Sociocracy, an especially effective self-governance and decision-making method. See* www.DianaLeafeChristian.org. *Previous articles in this series included parts One (*Communities *#193, Winter 2021), Two (#194, Spring 2022), Three (#196, Fall 2022), Four (#197, Winter 2022), and Five (#198, Spring 2023).*

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1. First described in "A Graduated Series of Consequences and 'The Community Eye,'" Communities #184.
2. Asking someone to leave the community is not possible or legal in US or Canadian communities in which people own and have deeds to their housing units, apartments, lots, or houses–such as in most cohousing communities–since property rights trump internal community agreements. An exception would be communities owned as housing co-ops, in which the group has the legal right to choose its members and, if desired, to ask them to leave.

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• BIPOC ICC (BIPOC Intentional Communities Council): **bipocicc.org**

• CohoUS (Cohousing Association of the United States): **cohousing.org**

• CSA (Communal Studies Association): **communalstudies.org**

• ICSA (International CSA): **icsacommunity.org**

• GEN (Global Ecovillage Network): **ecovillage.org** and its regions: **ecovillage.org/region/gen-africa ecovillage.org/region/gen-europe ecovillage.org/region/casa ecovillage.org/region/genoa ecovillage.org/region/genna**

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We welcome stories and connections from throughout these and related networks, and hope to hear from you!

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