

Devil's Advocate Activity

Grade Level: All

Time: 30 min.

Purpose: There are many occasions during Public Achievement meetings when it may be helpful for one or two members of the group to be the designated devil's advocate-- someone who brings opposing points of view to the conversation in order to stimulate debate. It is important that teams consider their issue from different points of view.

Description:

Almost every issue has a controversy related to it, and this exercise can help the team to more completely understand the issue and the controversy. Thorough comprehension of an issue regardless of how complex, will give them more tools to develop an effective action project. By looking at opposing points of view, the team can more easily identify and understand potential obstacles to their project.

The devil's advocate's job is to take the opposite side of the issue or problem. Public Achievement group members usually agree that the project they are working on will help the community. It is important to consider that everyone may not agree. For example, one high school Public Achievement group chose the issue of teen pregnancy. They recognized a need to have a child care center in their school because many students with babies were dropping out of school. In this case the devil's advocate would have to think about who might be against in-school child care and why.

By having one person in the group be the appointed devil's advocate, it deepens the discussion by bringing in more diverse points of view. The devil's advocate often has to stretch his/her thinking especially when opposition hasn't been considered. This exercise also illustrates how disagreement can be productive.

It is important to prepare the team member who will perform the devil's advocate role so that he/she has a chance to really think about, and even research, the controversy surrounding the issue.

Over time the role of the devil's advocate may not need to be an assigned role. As the group sees the value of debate and develops the skills of thinking broadly, everyone in the group could raise controversial points.