

Subject: Why Our Group Uses a Timer For Our Member Shares – from IL212

Through the years we had experiences where some people frequently dominated the meeting by taking more than what would be considered their fair share of time during the personal sharing portion. It was always our intent to give the opportunity to share to everyone who wanted it.

Even though we asked people to be mindful of the time they took, based on the number of people there, extended shares by one or more people frequently kept others from having a chance to share. Even though it had been brought up at business meetings, the idea of doing something different did not get enough support. But eventually that changed and by group conscience the decision was made to start having a spiritual timekeeper. But we always had people who objected to it.

Several years ago we decided to take a look at why the use of a timer was a positive thing for our group. In doing so, we created the following statement that we started reading before our sharing guidelines: *"We time our shares so that unlike in our families of origin, each of us will now have an equal opportunity to speak."*

This summed it up for us - that most of us weren't treated equally in our families and now it wasn't even happening in our meetings. What we were often seeing was that the people who didn't seem mindful of the rest of us when they shared fell into three categories: 1) they weren't able to judge the time they were taking and were generally apologetic when others then missed their opportunity to share; 2) they were not forming fellowship relationships outside of the meeting to help them process what was happening with them; 3) (with the full realization that this may sound judgmental) a very small minority were experienced as not caring about others, in the sense that they seemed to feel they were entitled to take all the time they wanted. Some of these individuals, when they were asked to bring their share to a close, became angry, and/or refused the offer of speaking with someone after the meeting.

Since we started adding the phrase about why we time, we have had almost no issue in our meeting. Some who previously objected to the use of a timer were now fine with it. And those who still didn't like it have either found a level of acceptance or left our meeting. Some who feel startled by an audible timer have even begun setting their own timer. We are not rigid in the use of a timer; people can finish their thought - they don't just get cut off mid-sentence. And we are sensitive to someone who is in the middle of a very emotional share by giving them up to an extra minute or so.

Because some members feel that an advance warning that their time is almost up breaks their train of thought, our spiritual timekeeper does not give such a reminder unless the speaker requests it.

Adding the statement about the reason for our use of a timer has been a win/win for us. Understanding that there can be a connection between the lack of fairness in childhood to a potential lack of fairness around sharing time in our meetings is important to our group's unity.