Some Reasons Why People Don’t Talk & Some Possible Remedies

Reason 1: Individual sees others as agreeing with them; there is no need to speak.
Remedy: Check to see if agreement is real or only superficial.

Reason 2: Individual is a little slower to speak than other members and someone always beats them to it. If this happens often enough, they will probably stop trying.
Remedy: Watch for signs that they are about to speak. Recognize them even if you have to cut someone else off. Hold back the quick talkers by asking to hear from “the others,” “the other side of the room,” or “the opposition.”

Reason 3: A person believes they have little influence on the group, they are a minority, or it is a lost cause.
Remedy: Convince this person that they have, or can have, more influence than they think. Call for and respect other opinions. Insist on careful analysis of all sides of a problem.

Reason 4: Individual does not want to influence others in the group.
Remedy: Help them feel more concern for the subject and for the group itself.

Reason 5: Individual lacks confidence in their verbal expression abilities. Perhaps they have been made to feel embarrassed by halting and awkward attempts to speak.
Remedy: Watch for signs of silent participation and, when appropriate, ask them for an opinion. If you know they have information or an opinion, ask for it. Ask them to look up something and report aloud. If they do not speak, welcome the contribution.

Reason 6: There is not enough time for everyone to have a chance to speak or to warm up to the silent member.
Remedy: Allow enough time, or break up into subgroups or buzz sessions.

Reason 7: Individual lacks confidence in their verbal expression abilities. Perhaps they have been made to feel embarrassed by halting and awkward attempts to speak.
Remedy: Watch for signs of silent participation and, when appropriate, ask them for an opinion. If you know they have information or an opinion, ask for it. Ask them to look up something and report aloud. If they do not speak, welcome the contribution.

Reason 8: Individual feels inadequate concerning knowledge of the subject being discussed.
Remedy: Present basic information in advance. Encourage members to read. Involve them on a level appropriate to their background. Ask for opinion instead of facts.

Reason 9: The group contains people on a higher level of organizational structure or with greater power or status, and the individual waits for them to give the “cue” lest they say the wrong thing.
Remedy: Try to develop a climate in which the sincere opinion of each member is respected. Hold back the high power people until the others have expressed themselves. Let the quiet persons give their opinions by cloaking them with “what others say.”

Reason 10: Talking may be dangerous. An unpopular or unusual opinion may produce ridicule, rejection, or even retaliation. A sensitive person may prefer to remain silent rather than risk getting hurt.
Remedy: Try to ensure that unorthodox and minority ideas are given a fair hearing. Watch your own reactions. Direct discussion to the idea, not the person who presented it. Balance emotion with facts, heat with light. Add a touch of humor when appropriate.

Borrowed from an unknown source.
Some Reasons Why People Don’t Talk & Some Possible Remedies

Reason 11: A person may have a good idea but be unwilling to submit it to the group for fear of what may happen to it.
Remedy: Welcome all ideas and suggestions. Depersonalize them by listing them all on the board before discussion. Don’t refer to them as belonging to any single person.

Reason 12: Every time the individual has made a suggestion, they have been appointed chairperson of a committee to carry it out.
Remedy: Don’t penalize an “idea person” by making them carry out all of their good ideas.

Reason 13: Individual is interested but has lost track of the discussion.
Remedy: Use summaries and reviews more often. Keep discussion “on the beam.” Write the issue or topic on the board where it will serve as a silent reminder and guide to the discussion.

Reason 14: Individual is not interested in the subject or this aspect of it...They have become bored and indifferent.
Remedy: Bring out inter-relationships and make applications. Test proposals against reality and principles.

Reason 15: The subject is too personal or emotional to “bare one’s soul.”
Remedy: Use question box, written questions, buzz groups. Use the “third person” approach.

Reason 16: Individual feels superior to the rest of the group; this discussion is way below their knowledge and experience level.
Remedy: If really are “superior”, use them as a resource person. Ask them to cover aspects not covered. If the person only feels superior and really isn’t, try to involve them through better questions.

Reason 17: The subject is exhausted as far as they are concerned.
Remedy: If it is, go on to another. If it isn’t, explore new angles.

Reason 18: Individual thinks discussion is the same as argument and has been brought up to think arguing isn’t nice.
Remedy: Try to develop a healthy respect for free and responsible discussion as the basis for democracy.

Reason 19: The chairperson has expressed an opinion and, while they would oppose it, they have been brought up to think one should not publicly differ from the leader.
Remedy: Remain neutral, at least until your group has developed to the point where the members do not hesitate to disagree with the chairperson.

Reason 20: Individual is interested but does not want to prolong the meeting by bringing up new points.
Remedy: Allow a reasonable time for the discussion. Get to the issues as soon as possible. If necessary, postpone the decision until time is available for a more thorough discussion.

Borrowed from an unknown source.