

This Happened with Pat and Ryan

You were assigned to a group project on maternal mortality with Pat and Ryan. This project requires a jointly-written research paper with a half-hour presentation to the class. You tried to create a specific workplan for the project with check-in points and detailed planning, but Pat canceled the last three meetings at the last minute, resulting in a good deal of disorganization. Ryan didn't resist planning or meeting but also didn't do anything to move things forward. To make matters worse, Ryan's contribution to the research paper—e-mailed to you only a few days before the paper was due—was poorly written, poorly cited, and not very substantive. Pat's section was well-researched and thorough—but totally overlapped with your own section! You are disgruntled, to say the least, because you had to find a way to integrate the pieces of the paper, fill in the gaps, AND get Ryan's portion up to snuff. As if you didn't have enough on your plate already with five classes this term. You have a nagging feeling of resentment at Pat, too. From the outset of this project, Pat has played "the expert," having worked for two years previously at an NGO that addressed maternal mortality in West Africa. You know Pat is going to dominate the class presentation and take the bulk of the credit—even though you have done the bulk of the actual work! Experience is helpful, of course, but it doesn't come with a free pass to avoid all the grunt work.

Your group is scheduled to give its presentation in two days. Your section is polished and practiced, you sent a PowerPoint template to Pat and Ryan last week so that your project might at least *look* cohesive, and you've even written a slide with a summary of key "take home" points for the end. And you actually managed to get everyone together today to practice the presentation!

Unfortunately, Pat's section is first. Pat drones on and on, tells too many stories "from the field," uses up twice the allotted amount of time and covers several points that you are planning to make. You go next, and you make sure to point out the areas where Pat wandered into "your" section of the material. You're trying to be casual and friendly about it, but you know you don't look happy. And you are positively cringing by the time Ryan finishes up. With so many "umms" and pauses, and slides that are vague and disorganized, it's hard to figure out what the message is. You can try to salvage the whole mess with a few concise summary points at the end, but at this point you're really feeling discouraged and annoyed. If these guys were your employees, they'd be on the unemployment line by now!

Individual Reflection/Writing

You have decided to confront Pat and Ryan. You've been thinking about this a lot and you just can't let things continue this way; your grade on this important project is at stake, and the stress is really wearing on you.

1. Describe the problem(s) from your own point of view. Identify each point of contention as you see it.

2. In the description you just wrote, what assumptions have you made about Pat and Ryan's motivations or intentions? For each, come up with some alternative explanations for the behavior, giving them the full benefit of the doubt.

3. What role could you have played in the problem? (What aspects of your own behavior might have affected your interactions with Pat and Ryan? What assumptions might they have made about your behavior?)

4. Of course, you really can't fully understand the roots of the conflict without more information—without actually talking to Pat and Ryan. Write a brief script to begin your discussion (just a few sentences). Think about the following questions as you prepare your discussion starter.
 - a. What is your goal in resolving this conflict? Looking at the problems you identified, what issue is most important to you? Focus on the most important issue.
 - b. How will you ensure that the other person feels safe (not attacked) and respected?
 - c. How will you establish and convey a common purpose and mutual benefit?
 - d. How will you create an opening for them to share their side of the story?