

Facilitation Skills and Techniques

Being a good facilitator is both a skill and an art. People can learn certain techniques and can improve their ability with practice, but some people just do have more of a knack for it than others.

Facilitating a meeting requires someone who:

- understands the goals of the meeting and the organization
- is able to keep the group on the agenda and moving forward
- can involve everyone in the meeting, both controlling the domineering people and drawing out the shy ones
- will make sure that decisions are made democratically

Learning these skills and techniques will lead to effectiveness as a facilitator.

1. Keep Moving Forward

- **Balance process and product**—Seek to find and maintain a balance between process and task. A balance makes it easier for a group to accomplish its tasks and achieve goals. Aim for 70% process, 30% product during meetings.
 - **HOW** things get done in a group is related to the process of the group *balance towards process*:
 - a. more time will be spent on how things are done in the group
 - b. pace may be slower and more time is spent on how people are feeling about themselves, others and the group
 - c. Participants who are keen to get on with the action may feel impatient with the slower pace.
 - **WHAT** gets done in a group is determined by the task roles and behaviors *balance toward tasks*:



- a. more time will be spent allocating tasks, receiving information and data, setting deadlines and sorting out practical details
 - b. pace may be faster and people will be concentrating on analysis and actions rather than feelings
 - c. Some members may not participate and feel left out
- **Monitor timeframe**
 - Get through the agenda.
 - Do not lose track of time.
 - End on time, regardless of where the group is with the agenda.
- **Keep moving the group to action**
 - Know the desired outcome for this meeting.
 - Define the steps to be taken.
 - Make a decision about who will take responsibility.
 - Set time lines for when will it be done.
- **Agreement**
 - Use a collective decision making process.
 - Aim for consensus decisions (all members of the group agree) for especially critical agreements. Voting by majority or otherwise, often leads to feelings of win-lose
- **Creativity**
 - Exploring alternatives is different from giving advice.
 - Identify and consider many options to solving a problem.
 - Evaluate each possible course of action and obtain a commitment to action.
- **Humor**
 - Using humor can effectively defuse some tense moments.
 - Use it carefully at the right time.
- **Closing**
 - Make connections.
 - Summarize themes.
 - Link members with each other and resource.
 - Connect ideas, issues, learnings.
 - Check in—ask if everyone got what they needed at this meeting.
 - Next steps.



2. Be Alert

- **Develop discernment**
 - Be aware of when is someone upset
 - Note who is fired up and raring to go
 - Notice who is frustrated
 - Listen and act without judgment
 - Watch for someone sabotaging the group
 - Observe and be sensitive
 - Be keenly aware of comments
 - Note side exchanges
- **Monitor the energy level**
 - Energy is indicated by body posture, tone of voice, eye contact, level of participation and level of activity directed toward the task.
 - Use a short break if necessary. Short breaks can help keep energy up for longer sessions. Concentration is hard to maintain for longer than 30-40 minutes

3. Be Respectful

- **Acknowledge and affirm others**
 - Recognize individual members.
 - Model the idea of affirmation and acknowledgement of others.
 - Pick up on the small effort.
 - Recognize contributions.
 - Build on comments.
- **Respect differing opinions**
 - Solicit all points of view.
 - Ask the tough questions.
 - Raise issues that others may have.
 - Make no assumptions.



- **Self disclose**
 - Share just enough to make a human connection with others. Too much inhibits and closes the group interaction.

4. Communicate

- **Use questions --guide the process and clarify with questions**
 - *Can you tell us more about that?*
 - *What are some other options?*
 - *Do people have other thoughts?*
 - perception checking—*Are you saying that . . . ?*
- **Negotiate**
 - Seek to understand first, then respond.
 - Listen without interpreting what others say.
 - Don't search for underlying or hidden motivations or meaning.
 - Be willing to give in order to get.
- **Suggest**
 - Use statements like, *'I suggest...'* or *'have you thought about...'*
 - Avoid offering advice
 - Use "I" messages to indicate a willingness to take responsibility for personal feelings. The formula for constructing an "I" message is: *'When (state the behavior) I feel (state the feeling) because (state the consequence).'*
 - Avoid the practice of name-calling, blaming and using "you" message.
- **Provide feedback and intervention**
 - Process observation – *We all seem to be struggling with ----- lately.*
 - Group feedback – *We've strayed off the topic now.*
 - Individual feedback – *You've really been hit with a lot of information.*
 - Re-direction – *You were talking about your concerns about bussing*
 - Summarizing – taking a rambler's thoughts and putting them into one or two sentences or short phrase
 - Paraphrasing—*What you are saying is...*

