

How to be an Effective Facilitator

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A facilitator is like a referee, most effective from the sidelines and not a part of the decision making process.

Instead of offering opinions...	Facilitators stay neutral and provide structure for discussion.
Instead of promoting a point of view, they manage participation...	They manage participation to ensure that all voices are heard.
Instead of making decisions...	Facilitators provide the methods for group members to formulate solutions.



Leading a meeting (or conversation) versus facilitating a meeting is different because when facilitating, you are giving the group more of an opportunity to share openly without you directing the course of the conversation. You are focusing on the context (or process), rather than the content. Therefore, in order to succeed, a great facilitator must believe:

- That people are capable and want to do the right thing
- That members can and will act responsibly in assuming true accountability for their decisions
- That groups can manage their own conflicts, behaviors and relationships when given the right tools and training
- That the process, if well designed and honestly applied, can be trusted to achieve results

That being said, a facilitator is not passive. As the leader of your group, or team, you are in charge as a facilitator to:

- Provide processes to structure conversations
- Create an atmosphere in which ideas can be shared openly
- Help the group communicate clearly
- Provide feedback to group members for better growth
- Foster leadership in others
- Empower members to make decisions
- Enable team members to access their own inner strengths and talents, rather than telling them what to do

The content, or material generated from the session, by definition is the task at hand, or the thing that needs to be discussed. The context, what the facilitator leads, includes the group dynamics, the climate/tone that's established, procedures and tools used.

The true facilitator leaves the content to the participants but aides in setting the appropriate context for the group.

Content/Process Table

Content	Process
<u>What</u>	<u>How</u>
The task	The methods
The subjects for discussion	The tools used
The problems being solved	How relations are maintained
The decisions made	The rules or norms set
The agenda items	The group dynamics
The goals	The climate

What to do to:

- Assess the needs of the group before the meeting
- Research their situation to be able to ask the right questions
- Give clear instructions, affirming your role and objectives, timing, etc.
- Select the tools and techniques to be used in the meeting
- Explain those tools and techniques at the start of the session

How to do it:

- Ask questions – be clear that your questions are not trying to be judgmental or leading
- May need to be directive when you are the only ones accountable/qualified to make a decision
- Stay focused on how things are going throughout the meeting to free members to focus on the content
- Mediate conflicts and redirect poor behaviors
- Periodically take the pulse of the group to gather feedback and improve the process
- Help members make decisions and summarize their deliberations

By succeeding in this process, you will get the opportunity as Leader to build trust within your team. If you are a good facilitator, your direct reports are going to feel listened to, supported, and encouraged to express their ideas without backlash. You will also begin to build a corporate culture in which the art of communication (learning to listen and not just talk) becomes one of the pillars of your success.