

Three Quick Tips for the Meeting Facilitator

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Facilitating a meeting can be frustrating. Often, nothing gets accomplished. People start talking among themselves, or they start texting on their phone. No one seems to know where the meeting is going. To get results, you need to understand some key principles.

Have a well thought-out agenda. Focus on the topics pertinent to the listeners in front of you. Don't try to cover too much in one session. As you create your agenda, add a time frame. Ahead, determine how long the group should spend discussing each item and hold them to it. A time frame alleviates people wasting time. Additionally, after each agenda item, list the desired outcomes. This will help attendees stay focused on the end game.

For example:

Agenda

1. **Current Production problems (20-25 min)**
Desired Outcome: Determine which are under our control and fixable
2. **Equipment Problems (15-20 Min)**
Desired outcome: Determine top three priorities for fiscal 2013 budget.
3. **Scheduling -Shift Issues (5-10min)**
Desired outcome: Address re-occurring problems

Ask questions that challenge and make people visualize. The best facilitators know that the questions they ask are critical. While they use a whole variety of questions to focus the group, gather information and build consensus, great facilitators kick off each agenda item with a “killer” opening question. For example, “Imagine a week of flawless production. Customers got their product when they needed it. What had to happen before, after and during production to make that happen?” A question like this quickly gets people involved and prompts more useful answers. A good starter question adds enough detail to make people visualize or revisit the

situation. It is much more stimulating than, “What are your current production problems?”

Keep the group on target. Some responses from participants will be right in line with the discussion, but some will veer off track and some may even be unclear. The wise facilitator reacts to those situations with questions. The weak facilitator reacts with a statement. By asking questions, instead of making prescriptive statements, you encourage participants to seek their own solutions. When a participant keeps repeating the same point, you might say, “Can you tell us what we have left out?” When a participant goes off topic, you might respond with, “Yes, but I am wondering how that affects production numbers.”

Being a good facilitator isn't easy. It takes practice and seeking opportunities to practice. We have offered you three tips. Continue to add to your toolbox and facilitate every chance you get. Real improvement cannot come without commitment and opportunities.

Question: *Think about the last time you facilitated a meeting. What difficulties did you have? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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