

DMIT2000

Characteristics of Good Discussion Facilitation

Every time there is a business meeting, it must have a purpose. Effective discussion facilitators have the skills to hold good meetings. People feel very frustrated when their time is wasted by unskilled facilitators who cannot keep on topic, on time, and meet the meeting objectives. As a leader, you lose respect if the meetings you facilitate are not productive. On the other hand, people pay attention to you if you hold a good discussion and get results.

There is a certain way to approach group meetings. The facilitator must be clear about the purpose and let others know what that purpose is and how much time they will spend reaching their goals. Every meeting has to have a start and end time with a clear “agenda” – the list of topics that need to be discussed and how long will be assigned to each topic.

Things to do to have a good meeting:

1. **You are NOT a Presenter.** Your job is not to give a speech. Your main job is to facilitate, which means you:
 - a. Listen
 - b. Direct/summarize
 - c. Guide decisions
2. **Prepare.** Read as much as you can about your discussion topic. Make sure you know facts and figures and the background.
3. **Introduce.** Start by stating why you have a meeting and what you want to accomplish.
4. **Ask for Input.** Your job is to get others to talk first. That is your most important task. Of course, you can offer feedback too. But do so after you have heard others.
5. **Have Discipline.** Stay focused on the goal of the meeting. While having fun and keeping the meeting "light" is always a plus, too much fun can derail the meeting. Sometimes, some participants may be distracted, want to have too much fun, or can't focus. As a facilitator, you need to guide such people to focus on the topic.
6. **Be Confident.** If you are shy by nature, try to come out of your comfort zone and experiment with being courageous, audacious and assertive. Pretend if you have to. Gradually, you will get better and will have more confidence.
7. **Keep Time in Mind.** Have your watch in front of you to make sure you know how much time you have left. In meetings, most people are aware of the time. If the facilitator is not, it can frustrate people.
8. **Get Participation.** In any group, you will find people who like to talk. For them, talking is a way of thinking. Others might be quiet. For them, thinking is a way of figuring out the best approach, except they won't say it. You need both styles for good meetings. But sometimes you have to encourage people to speak.
9. **Look for Balance.** Make sure no one person will dominate the discussion; that includes you. Call on people by name for their opinion. Also, keep gender balance in mind. If there are males and female present, make sure both speak at the meeting.
10. **Direct.** If someone says something that is not correct, politely state the facts. If people get off topic, re-direct them to the main issues. If someone talks too much, politely ask for others to offer input. And if someone says something inappropriate or rude, firmly and compassionately ask them to respect others.
11. **Focus.** Your job as a facilitator is to get results. Make sure your meeting is successful by thinking of why you are meeting and if the meeting is successful.