EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

*Ten Tips for Creating Engagement*

Training is a fun and exciting way to teach others a new skill. It is the facilitator’s responsibility to guide the group toward reaching the goals and objectives of the training. As a facilitator, you do not need to be an expert or even the most knowledgeable person in the room. However, as a facilitator, you should be the most prepared person in the room. Being prepared means thorough familiarity with the materials, and it also means having a few tools and resources to use throughout the actual session.

10 Habits of Effective Facilitators

Even the most prepared facilitator needs to have a few resources to use in order to make sure the training experience is a success. Below are ten tips and tricks to help you make your session excellent and engaging.

1. PRACTICE YOUR SESSION, NO MATTER WHAT!

1. At the start of the training, establish norms for the session. Let the group decide what they should be, and write them on butcher paper and display them at the front of the room. Typical training norms include things like “we will stay on schedule,” “we will be respectful of other participants’ ideas,” and things like that. Then, you can point to these norms throughout the session to remind people of the need to stick to them.

1. When writing on butcher paper, alternate colors of markers. For example, when writing out a list, use a red marker for the first point, and a blue marker for the second point. This will make the writing more visible to people in the back of the room.

1. At the start of the training, be clear about when you’ll be answering questions. Post a piece of butcher paper at the front of the room with the title “Parking Lot.” If someone asks an off-topic question, acknowledge it is important, but that it is off-topic for the session. Write the question on the butcher paper so that it may be addressed at a later time.

1. When posing a question to participants for discussion, don’t be afraid of silence. People need time to think and reflect. Sometimes silence will help someone build up the courage to make a valuable point. As a rule, count in your head and wait seven seconds after posing a question. It will feel like forever to you, but resist the urge to break the silence!

1. As a way to prevent one or two people from dominating the conversation, don’t ask people to volunteer to contribute to the discussion; instead, call on people who aren’t speaking up often. One trick is to visually divide your training space into four quadrants. For each discussion point, call on participants from a different quadrant. This will help keep the entire room engaged and participating.

1. If asking participants if there are any questions, phrase it openly: “What questions do you have?” If the question is closed in nature, participants may not feel comfortable asking questions. Avoid asking “Are there any questions?”

1. Acknowledge that you are hearing and understanding participants by repeating back or paraphrasing their comments. This will let your audience know you value their comments, and you are actively listening.

1. Prevent discussions from careening off track by setting expectations. “We’ll discuss this for five minutes and then move on,” or “I’d like to hear from four people on this topic before we move on.”
2. When someone poses a question you’re not sure how to answer, throw it back to the group by simply asking, “What do you think?” This will almost always result in the group answering the question in the best way possible.