Basics of Being a Facilitative Leader

By Marilyn Hunter – Hunter Consulting

Preparation:

The key to success of a session is preparation. I break it down into the 6 Ps for preparation

Purpose – Why are we holding this session?

- What are the key objectives?
- What is telling you that this session is needed?
- What are the problems you are trying to solve?
- How do you know there is a problem?
- What are the symptoms?
- What is the implication of not solving the problem?
- Purpose answers the question "Why are we holding this session.

Product – What do we need to have when we are done?

- How will we know we have been successful?
- It turns what might be a highly nebulous purpose statement into a set of distinct deliverables that define achievement of the purpose
    - Things that you can hold in your hands, in your head (knowledge) and in your hearts (beliefs) – that you didn't have before
    - Questions you might ask to identify the product:
        - What is it that you are hoping to achieve from this session
        - What specific tangible products or deliverable should people have in their hands when the session is over?
        - When the session is over, what do you want people to know (that they don't know now), and what do you want people to believe (that they may not believe now)?
        - 3-6 months from this session, how will you know you have been successful?
    - Like:
        - Key strategies identified
        - High-level implementation timeline with roles and responsibilities
        - Consensus on an approach to standards

Participants – Who needs to be involved and what are their perspectives?

- Who are the people who will be impacted by the decision?
- What level of involvement should they have in the process?
- Whose perspectives, involvement and buy-in are so critical that they should be at the table or represented by someone else?
- Resolution mode: 3-9
- Creation mode – 7-16
- Direction setting (strategic planning-depending on size of dept) – no more than 20
- Review mode (commenting on previous work) – 2-100

Probable issues – What are the concerns that will likely arise? What are the "gotchas" that could prevent us from creating the product and achieving the purpose?

- Topics – questions and other items that will need to be covered by the agenda in order to create the products and achieve the meeting purpose

- Ditches – difficult items that must be addressed, but that can derail the meeting if not handled well.
- Red herrings – items that are not directly related to the topic and should not be addressed, but may come up.
- Questions to ask:
    - What are the topics that must be discussed to achieve the meeting purpose and create the products/
      What are the question or concerns the participants will have about the purpose or products?
    - What are potential ditches or red herrings we will encounter in achieving the purpose and products?

Process – What steps are needed during the meeting to achieve the purpose, given the product desired, the participants and the probable issues we will/might face?

- The process or agenda that you will use in a session will depend on the other four Ps.
- If the purpose is the steering wheel of a car, process is the engine. Purpose sets the direction; process get you to your destination.
- Process is simply a series of steps to arrive at a result.
    - What would the process be if you were taking a hamburger order at a drive-through window?
    - Would the process be different if you were disabling a bomb?
    - Often the process doesn't get our attention until it breaks down – like the process used to get your luggage from your departing city to your arrival destination baggage claim area.
    - This is the "method" which includes the relationship of the participants and building the team.

Place – Where will the meeting be held? In-person or virtual. If in-person, who will be the contact person, who can help with any AV, supplies, room set-up, etc. If it's virtual, what type of tool will you use and are you comfortable with the tool?

- There are numerous logistics involved in preparing for a facilitated meeting, such as timing, location and materials.
- These items help to clarify the understanding of what is to be accomplished, why, by whom and how.
- When should you arrive to in-person meetings? 30-45 minutes prior – set up, get flip-charts ready, greet people as they arrive
- It's good to schedule a "gathering time" – 15 minutes prior to the starting time
- Make sure whoever is "kicking off the meeting" know about it ahead of time & it is best if you can meet them prior to the start of the meeting.
- If it's virtual, be sure you have the link to provide to the participants.

Questions to ask yourself as you prepare:

1. How to get people excited about participating in a solution process?
2. How to keep people focused and engaged?
3. How to ask questions that challenge without alienation
4. How to guide a team without overpowering it?
5. How to address disagreements and build consensus?
6. How to deal with people who drop out, dominate, or demonstrate other dysfunctional behaviors that can be disruptive?
7. How to ensure that you gain commitment to action?
8. What do I need to bring or "ask for", to accomplish the activities?

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Starting the Session:

So, you've prepared and you're ready to get started! Here are the first 5 things to do:

- Inform – purpose, why they're there; Why should I invest the time?
- Excite – you have to show excitement to get them excited!
- Empower – what authority do they have
- Involve – introductions, questions or expectations (involve them in the first 5 minutes-even if it's just to raise their hands)
- Get buy in on agenda – why is getting buy-in on the agenda so important?
    - So that it's clear what you plan to do – it will help to keep them focused

Think back to how I open this session? This isn't a facilitated session for me, as I'm in a training role, instead of a facilitator role, but I use many of the same techniques even when training.

Then do introduction and ask about their objectives or what they want to get out of the session. Today, I asked about what you wanted to learn or get help with leading/facilitating meetings.

Ground Rules you can use:

- **Everyone Speaks -** we want to give everyone an opportunity to give input;
- **Respect the Speaker** - this community planning process brings together people who are on different sides of the issue. And while we may disagree with what someone says, we cannot afford to have disparaging remarks made about people or organizations. This will surely poison our efforts. Let's respect whoever is speaking.
- **One Conversation at a Time** - so we won't be distracted by comments going on around us. Sometimes I might say: "Since we have lots of people here, let's keep our comments brief and limit them to a maximum Two Minutes for any one comment." This also ties to "Respect the Speaker"
- **Boards -** If an item comes up that is not directly related to the current issue, let's put it on the Open Issues List or Parking Lot so we can address if we have time, or to be taken back to the relevant group.

Others I've used:

- ELMO – Enough, Let's Move On!
- eManners - phones on vibrate (step out if you absolutely need to take a call), computers and tablets are for those taking notes, or action items. Otherwise, they are a distraction of people's attention.
- Start and end on time

Parking boards – help the group avoid going off on tangents by providing a place to put topic that come up that are not the focus of the current discussion

- Open Issues list/Parking Lot – to be discussed later or if you have time – if not, another meeting to address
- Decisions – that should be documented
- Actions – action, who and when

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Example of an Opening Session

1. Welcome & housekeeping
2. Session purpose & product (inform, excite, empower)
3. Introductions and a personal question – (depending on size of group) – Involve
4. Participants' expectations (involve – write down)
5. Agenda (get the buy-in)
6. Ground rules (keep simple but allow them to add)
7. Parking boards (ask someone to help with these)
8. Questions - end of opening…on to 1st major agenda item

Focusing the Group:

Focusing is important – and can be tricky.

Checkpoint:

- We have just completed the getting started segment (review) – check that off the agenda. Our next step is to identify how the…. process works today (preview). This is important, because if we can identify all the steps in the process, we can examine where in the process the problems are occurring and then identify ways to make it a much better process (big view) The way we are going to do this is…
- Why do a checkpoint? – serves as awareness that a transition is taking place. It also shows how important the next step is by explaining how it related to the overall purpose of the session.

When a group loses focus?

- Ask some questions
    - Start with one that they have to raise their hands or nod their heads – you should gesture what you're looking for

Asking questions and especially your 1st question to get them thinking and visualizing

- We will be talking in more detail in the next session about the different type of questions, and how to use them

On track - REDIRECTION - sometimes if you ask for permission to table an issue by putting on the issues list, someone may disagree. Put the question to the group or to the meeting sponsor (if appropriate).

- "This would be a detour off our main course, but if the group is for it, we can do it. How much time do you think we'll need? " Then check with the group. (simple majority).

Break out groups

Giving clear directions

- PeDeQs:
    - **P**urpose - State the purpose of the activity
    - **E**xample - Then give an example.
    - **D**irections - Give general directions – using verbal pictures and gestures
    - **E**xceptions - Explain specific exception and special cases
    - **Q**uestions - Ask for Questions

- **S**tart - Tell them to get started

Sample:

- **P -** "We are going to work on the Root Cause of our issue___________________, because in order to find a solution, we need to know what we think the root causes are for that issue."
- **E** - "For example, if we were cooking a turkey dinner, our problem might be "a burnt turkey". A symptom might be "Turkey is black". The root cause might be that we cooked it too long. What else might be the root cause? We're not cooking a turkey dinner, but analyzing the problems of the …. process.
- **D – "**So, each team will grab a flip-chart page.
  - Appoint a leader that will lead the discussion, someone to capture the information & do the report out.
  - I would like you to write "Root Causes" as the title. Then write your team's name, number, etc. – then write the first name & last initial on the top of the flipchart. – why is it good to have people write the name of the people in the team?
  - We will be using this table to help identify the problems, symptoms and root causes (for whatever purpose). "
  - "Be sure to appoint team leader, scribe and reporter (and timer if necessary)."
  - Be sure to tell them: What their deliverable is. "What your group will bring back is a completed table"
  - What the deadline is for completion (and may interim deadline (like "You should be recording your result on the flip chart by… and completed by….")
  -
- **E – "**You might come up with an additional problem – add that to the bottom as an exception."
- **Q – "**Any questions?"
  - Be sure to create a bulleted list that you will use to convey your directions to the group. Then think, "where might someone be confused?"
- Use examples that are unrelated to what they are trying to analyze.
- Use a timer when you set time – when there is 2-3 minutes left, check in to see how groups are doing and if they need more time – ask how much?

Focused for report back:

- You've given them a 2–3-minute warning – next is to gather them up so they can focus on who is reporting out, not on their discussions, and chart
- Make sure you know how you'll do the report out. May select a team/table – or ask for a volunteer.
- If you have a competitive group, it's better to identify what tables will go first, second, etc.

Keeping the Energy High:

"Why is energy so important – Case study" – Contact Marilyn for that reading (hunterconsulting916@gmail.com)

1. Start a session with high energy! You will trail off at times. Your energy is contagious.
2. Maintaining energy throughout a session can be difficult. Utilize breaks to re-energize too, recheck yourself
3. Use team building activities when appropriate
4. Use varying volume and expressions.

Energy Level 3:

Many people are not aware of what level 3 energy looks and feels like. Here's what I've learned.

1. Imagine that you are sitting at a table with a close friend. Say the words, "Good morning. It is great to be here today."
2. Now imagine that you are standing in a moderately sized conference room with five people. Stand and say the words again as if you were speaking to all five.
3. Now imagine that you are in a much larger room, with five tables arranged in a semicircle and six people seated at each. Stand and say the words again as if you wanted the person furthest from you to hear your words and feel that you truly believe that it is great to be there. People frequently think that energy is volume. But when we do this exercise as part of our facilitation training, you quickly learn that there are several differences between their level 1 and level 3 expressions. When you speak at level 3, several things tend to happen: Your tone and modulation are enhanced. You emphasize key words more. You speak more clearly and distinctly, enunciating words more carefully. You slow down your speech and add longer pauses. You open your mouth wider and have a more animated facial expression. You gesture more, often using larger, more magnified gestures. You move your body more. And yes, you speak louder.

Don't sit - Sitting also drops my energy level. If you're in a meeting working on a document, you'll probably have to sit, or have a standing table for your computer.

Capturing the "Power of the Pen":

Why is it important to capture information on flipcharts?

- Helps to keep on track - visual
- Visually seeing what people have contributed
- The information is referred to as you move thru your process
- Go back to refer to the information
- It shows progress – especially when you finish

What to record:

- Record all decisions, actions, issues,, and relevant analysis
- Use someone else when possible – make sure you can read their handwriting
- Use headlines to get them to think concise
- Ask, record then react or discuss - Is this correct?
- Write so the Group can read – 6-8 lines per chart (except expectations)
- Use templates, headlines and abbreviations (so there isn't as much lull time)

Closing the Session:

Strong Closing (allow 15-30 minutes)

- Review what was done
- Address or clear the Issues List
- Confirm commitments to decisions and actions

- Define what can be communicated
- End with next steps
- Debrief the session
  - Get feedback on the value of the session
- Thank them for their work!

Recap of Techniques:

- Prep – key to success – 6 Ps
- Getting started – IEEI – Inform, excite, empower, involve
- Focusing – ask questions
- Pen – Write what they say – this is their work!
- Energy – you control the energy level
- Closing – that wraps the session up.

Engaging People on Virtual Meetings:

When engaging people on calls, you can't always see them, so you need to engage them from the beginning.

- Open the call up early, so people can jump on and find out how they are doing. "What's the weather like in their area, etc." – plan a gathering time of 10-15 minutes prior to call to chat
- Know who's on the call, so that you know who should be participating. It's best to be sure everyone on the call has at some point talked during your call. That way they will feel they had some input and people knew they were there and wanted to hear from them. If people feel valued on calls, they are more likely to participate.
- Think about questions to ask which we will discuss in the next session. That doesn't happen overnight, but if you start by asking a few, you should see more participation.
- There are a number of processes you can use to obtain input.
  - Round-Robin – this is a process of having everyone on the call provide input. Tell the group up front you would like to hear everyone's thoughts on the topic of (whatever topic you're going to talk about), and that you'll be starting at the top of the list (or the bottom) to get their response.
  - Select a group of people to respond, such as "I would like to hear from all the retailers on whatever subject. Know what company and who the retailers are on the call. When you think you've got all of them, you can ask "did I miss anyone"; or would any of the manufacturers or allied providers like to add input that wasn't covered?
  - People who are passionate about the topic, has some history or spoken to you in the past about it. Or someone who normally has an opinion that you can call on to talk first.
- If you are doing a round robin or a select group, it's good to prepare first, then ask the question. (Give them an example)
- As a leader, it's best to get others engaged with their input first, and then put your thoughts in at the end if they haven't already been shared.