

Why is high energy important?

I would like to read a case study to you. Written by Michael Wilkinson – CEO of Leadership Strategies.

I learned about the impact of energy the hard way, and it was deeply personal. I first began serving as a facilitator while a member of one of the national consulting firms. After about four years in the role, I was approached by one of the consulting partners, who said to me, “Do you know how much power you give up when you facilitate?” I was offended by the comment. I felt that I was a very good facilitator, thank you very much, and had the accolades of several clients to back up the claim. But the partner was trying to teach me a valuable lesson that I wasn’t ready to learn.

It took another three years and **two significant incidents** before I fully understood and appreciated the gift he was offering me.

The first of the two incidents occurred a year later. I was attending my first facilitation class in an effort to round out my skills. Although I learned considerably from the class, the activity that affected me most took place on the last day. There were sixteen people in the class, and each of us had to facilitate the entire group for a portion of that final day. What I witnessed amazed me. Each time a new person got up to facilitate, the room would take on the personality of the facilitator. If the facilitator was energetic, the participants became more energetic. If the facilitator was low energy, the level of energy in the room would significantly decrease. If the facilitator was folksy, the group became more folksy, and so on. Here were the same sixteen people, yet the room would take on the characteristics of the person leading. I found it astounding. I didn’t understand how important this was until the lessons came together two years later.

By this time I had become one of the founding members of the organization that I am a part of today. I was teaching our facilitation class

several times a month, and the class included having people facilitate for an extended period on the last day. In one class during that first year, one of the participants chose to use our project planning methodology for his extended session. He started the session with high energy. But halfway through, he got tripped up in his efforts to take the group through the agenda item “critical success factor analysis.” He became very unsure of himself, his energy level dropped significantly, and the session dragged terribly. During the feedback segment that followed, I asked him why he let his energy drop. He said, “I didn’t know what I was doing. I just wanted to get it over with.”

As it turned out, the next person to facilitate also used the project planning process. And when he got to critical success factor analysis, he also became confused. As I listened to the questions, he was asking the participants, it was readily apparent that he didn’t understand what he was doing. He was clearly lost. But he kept his energy up, and the people continued to follow him. It was like watching the blind leading the blind. He was leading them over a cliff, and they were going right along with him! During the debriefing, he confessed that he didn’t completely understand the process and got lost in the middle. But I turned to the group and asked them why they followed him.

One person responded, “He seemed confident. He seemed to know what he was doing.” At that moment, I finally understood what that partner three years before had been trying to teach me. And it is a lesson that we teach every facilitator we train.