

Communication Guru™

Tips, best practices, and resources for effective communication



by Debra Hamilton

Manager as Meeting Facilitator

“Facilitation is becoming a core competency for anyone who’s on a team, leading a task force, heading up a committee, or managing a department,” says Ingrid Bens, M.Ed., author of *Facilitation at a Glance!* In developing this competency, managers who lead meetings will step into the role of meeting *facilitator* where they shift from *problem solver* to *process leader*. In this position, a manager creates conditions for group participation, collaboration, and optimal results.

Scenario #1: Robert, a sales manager responsible for developing people and growing revenue, holds a weekly meeting to motivate his team toward higher sales goals. At last week’s meeting, he prepared an agenda around how to implement creative promotions that stimulate revenue opportunities. As the meeting facilitator, he engaged his team in a targeted brainstorming session. The team generated several creative ideas and then evaluated the pros and cons of each idea. Within 45 minutes, Robert had the best three ideas recorded on a flip chart and the team had ownership of the results.

Scenario #2: Carley, a customer care manager, oversees eight direct reports who are the primary contact point for all customers. She wants her team to assess its customer service performance. She plans a two-hour meeting where she will facilitate a gap analysis exercise to involve her team in identifying service barriers and developing an action plan for performance improvement. During the meeting, Carley created an open atmosphere and made the team members the center of attention. At the close of the meeting, her team was invigorated and committed to taking next steps.

As meeting facilitator, a manager provides structure, uses interactive methods, and motivates the group to focus on its specific task. This participant-focused approach produces better outcomes.

“Participant-focused meetings produce better outcomes.”

Best Practices for Facilitating Meetings

1. Establish a meeting objective and create an agenda. Invite participants to contribute to the agenda and preview it before the meeting.
2. Select participants carefully; invite experts and others who are impacted by the agenda.
3. Explain how participants should prepare. Create buy-in.
4. Set meeting ground rules and announce start and finish times.
5. Create a safe environment and encourage participants to work together.
6. Remain objective; allow the group to work through the process. Ask open-ended questions to stimulate discussion. Listen actively.
7. Keep the group moving toward the objective. Provide constructive feedback and offer suggestions when the group seems stuck.
8. Identify and manage sidetracks.
9. Manage difficult behaviors by stating what you are observing and the resulting impact.
10. Use a flip chart to record ideas using the participant’s own words. Paraphrase ideas for greater clarity.
11. Close the meeting with action steps.
12. Ask participants to evaluate the meeting.

Questions & Quandaries . . .

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