

Ten Tips When Facilitating Discussion

During an active meeting, you want lots of group discussion. Your role is to facilitate the flow of comments from participants. Although it is not necessary to interject your comments after each participant speaks, periodically assisting the group with their contributions can be helpful. Here is a ten-point facilitation menu to use as you lead group discussions.

1. **Paraphrase.** Paraphrase what a participant has said so that he or she feels understood and so that the other participants can hear a concise summary of what has been said. Say something like:
“So, what you’re saying is that we need to go slowly in changing our organizational structure.”
2. **Check for Meaning.** Check your understanding of a participant’s statement or ask the participant clarify what he or she is saying.
“Are you saying that this plan is not realistic? I’m not sure that I understand exactly what you mean.”
3. **Give Positive Feedback.** Compliment an interesting or insightful comment.
“That’s a good point. I’m glad that you brought that to our attention.”
4. **Expand.** Elaborate on a participant’s contribution to the discussion with examples, or suggest a new way to view the problem.
“Your comments provide an interesting point from the employee’s perspective. It could also be useful to consider how a manager would view the same situation.”
5. **Increase the Pace.** Energize a discussion by quickening the pace, using humor, or, if necessary, prodding the group for more contributions.
“Oh my, we have lots of tired people at this meeting! Here’s a challenge for you. For the next two minutes, let’s see how many ways you can think of to increase cooperation within our department.”
6. **Devil’s Advocate.** Disagree (gently) with a participant’s comments to stimulate further discussion.
“I can see where you are coming from, but I’m not sure that what you are describing is always the case. Has anyone else had an experience that is different from Jim’s?”
7. **Relieve Tension.** Mediate differences of opinion between participants and relieve any tensions that may be brewing.
“I think that Susan and Mary are not really disagreeing with each other but are just bringing out two different sides of this issue.”
8. **Consolidate.** Pull together ideas, showing their relationship to each other.
“As you can see from Dan’s and Jean’s comments, personal goal setting is very much a part of time management. You need to be able to establish goals for yourself on a daily basis in order to more effectively manage your time.”
9. **Change the Process.** Alter the method for obtaining participation or by having the group evaluate ideas that have been presented.
“Let’s break into smaller groups and see if you can come up with some typical customer objections to the products that were covered in the presentation this morning.”
10. **Summarize.** Summarize (and record, if desired) the major views of the group.
“I have noted four major reasons that have come from our discussion as to why managers do not delegate: (1) lack of confidence, (2) fear of failure, (3) comfort in doing the task themselves, and (4) fear of being replaced.”