



Powerful Questions for Facilitators


What to ask in order to be an effective facilitator

CONTENTS

Understanding Facilitation.....	3
Your Roles and Responsibilities as a Facilitator...4	
The Difference Between Content and Process.....5	
The Language of Effective Facilitators.....6	
Questions: Two Basic Types.....8	
Questions: Discovering Facts.....9	
Questions: Sensing Feelings.....10	
Questions: Soliciting More Information.....12	
Questions: Identifying Extremes.....14	
Questions: Indirect.....16	
Questions: Identifying Ideal Solutions.....18	

Click to navigate

Created by:
Active Presence Limited
Wirral
CH48 3JJ
UK

 +44 151 625 4655

 info@activepresence.com

Registered in England, company number: 4588126

VAT No: GB 854 2129 33

Copyright © 2013 Active Presence Limited

Reference is made to *Successful Speaking Secrets Quick Reference*
Written by Chris Davidson
Published in 2010
ISBN 9780955604126
Available from Active Presence Limited

Distribution date of this version: August 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher

Understanding Facilitation

In many organisations across the business spectrum, people are discovering the benefits of using a neutral third party to oversee and improve meetings. In the business world, the hybrid and vital role of facilitator has emerged.

What does a facilitator do?

A facilitator:

manages the meeting

gives participants the relevant structure and tools

makes sure everyone is heard

helps participants identify their goals

helps participants to develop their action plans

provides leadership

helps others assume responsibility and take charge themselves

A facilitator does not:

take part in the discussion

try to influence the outcome

offer their own view

make decisions

take control of the content

Examples of where facilitation skills can be useful:

a strategic planning session

a session to clarify objectives and create detailed results indicators

a priority-setting meeting

a team-building session

a program review/evaluation session

a communication/liaison meeting

a meeting to negotiate team roles and responsibilities

a problem-solving meeting

a meeting to share feedback and improve performance

a focus group to gather input on a new program or product

Your Roles and Responsibilities as a Facilitator

As a facilitator you can make a huge and varied contribution to an organisation:

You can help group members define their overall aim, as well as specific objectives and goals

You can instruct members on how to assess needs – and create plans to fulfil them

You will possess the correct knowledge of processes and skills needed to help participants become time effective and make high-quality decisions

You can provide feedback to the group, so that they can measure their progress and make adjustments where needed

You will emphasise the importance of communicating effectively, and ensure members know how to do this

Your aim will be to create a positive environment where employees can work productively and reach shared group goals

You will aim to manage conflict by implementing a collaborative approach

You can pass on your skills through teaching and empowering, so that members of the group will have a good idea of the art of facilitation

You can offer support and advice to members in managing their own personal dynamics

You will help participants assess the skills they already possess and advise them on how to acquire new ones.

The Difference Between Content and Process

To be a successful facilitator, you need to be clear about the difference between content and process.

Content means the subjects being discussed, and the tasks at hand. Content is expressed through the agenda and consumes most of the attention of the participants.

Process is the way in which the content is discussed; this should include things such as the style of interaction, the group dynamics and the climate that has been established.

It is your job as the facilitator to manage the process and leave the content to the participants.

Content	Process
What?	How?
The subjects for discussion	The methods and procedures
The task	How relations are maintained
The problems being solved	The tools being used
The decisions made	The rules or norms set
The agenda terms	The group dynamics
The goals	The climate

The Language of Effective Facilitators

When you act as a facilitator, you need to remain a neutral force for the whole time you are in control. There are four main language techniques that can help you focus on process and not influence content:

- Paraphrasing
- Feeling identification
- Insight clarification
- Observations of participant's conduct

The most important thing is that you must not sound judgemental or critical.

Paraphrasing

Involves describing, in your own words, what another person's remarks convey:

"Do I understand you correctly that..."

"Are you saying...?"

"What I'm hearing you say is..."

You need to be paraphrasing continuously throughout. It is a very useful way of dealing with potential conflicts and clarifying peoples' opinions. You will put members at ease by paraphrasing, simply because it shows their opinions are being heard and acknowledged.

Identifying feelings

This generally consists of specifying and identifying a feeling either by naming, using a metaphor or using a figure of speech.

"I feel we've run out of energy" (Naming)

"I feel as if we're facing a brick wall" (Metaphor)

"I feel like a fly on the wall" (Figure of speech)

As a facilitator, you need to be in tune with how you're feeling and be more than willing to share those feelings with the group. Honesty is definitely the best policy. Revealing your feelings encourages others to share their own.

Clarifying insight

This is describing what you perceive to be another person's inner state, to check if you understand what he or she is feeling.

"You appear upset by the last comment that was made. Are you?"

"You seem impatient. Are you anxious to move on to the next topic?"

Insight clarification lets you take the pulse of participants who may be experiencing emotions that get in the way of their participation. It also encourages a participant to share an opinion that they, initially, were not going to voice within the discussion group.

Observer conduct

This involves relating back to the participants what you have been able to observe about their behaviours, without making accusations or generalisations about them as people, or attributing motives to them,

“I’m noticing that we’ve only heard from this group of people throughout most of this discussion”

“I’m noticing that several people are working on their emails”

By describing specific behaviours, you give participants information about how their actions are being perceived. Feeding this information back to the participants in a non-threatening manner opens the door for individuals to suggest actions to improve the existing situation.

Questions: Two Basic Types

Open questions

An open question requires more than a yes or no answer, often stimulates thinking and usually begins with the words 'What', 'How', 'When' or 'Why?'

Example:

"What conclusion has the group come to, to decide whether today's meeting was a successful endeavour?"

Closed questions

A closed question requires a one-word answer, closes off discussion and usually begins with the words, 'Is', 'Can', 'How many', 'Does?'

Example:

"Is everyone happy to proceed to the next topic?"

Questions: Discovering Facts

This type of questioning helps you to assess the current situation of the organisation or its employees. These can often be closed questions which only require a one-word answer, a show of hands, or a short response from the participants. Verifiable data: Who? What? When? Where? How much?

Example questions:

“What kind of computer equipment are you now using?”

“What position in the company do you hold?”

“How much training did your staff receive at the start?”

“How many staff will be attending this meeting?”

“How many topics do we have to be discussed at this meeting?”

“Who is willing to be the spokesperson in your group?”

“Who here has been informed of the topics that are up for discussion today?”

“Where did the staff complete their training?”

“From where did the organisation originate?”

“Who does not fully understand the last point that was discussed?”

“How much of the last point discussed do you agree with?”

“Are you fully aware of the issues we need to discuss?”

“Where would you like to see the debate go next?”

“Would you attend another meeting like this?”

“Have you been involved in a meeting with the same concept as this one before?”

“How long have you been at the organisation?”

“Do you intend to stay at this organisation for the foreseeable future?”

“How much have you been told about the meeting here today?”

“Is there anybody here who knows the concept of facilitation?”

“Have we reached a conclusion everyone is happy with?”

“Is this an appropriate time slot for everyone?”

“Has everyone felt they have learned something today?”

Questions: Sensing Feelings

These questions are designed to unlock subjective information that gets at the participant's thoughts, values, opinions, feelings and beliefs. They are useful in allowing you to understand individual and collective views.

Sensing feelings questions usually contain words such as 'think' or 'feel'.

Example questions:

"How do you feel about the effectiveness of the new equipment?"

"Do you think that the staff felt they received enough training?"

"How did you feel about the points that were raised earlier in the meeting?"

"Do you think that after the meeting we will have reached a suitable agreement for all parties?"

"How do you feel about the new interview procedure that has been implemented?"

"Do you think that the marketing department has produced a product that meets the client's expectations?"

"How would you feel if you were put in the same situation?"

"Do you think that employees are listened to enough by the management?"

"How do you feel about the manner in which the task was completed?"

"Do you think that the method chosen to deal with this particular issue was the right choice?"

"Did you expect that enough time would be put aside to ensure the task was completed?"

"Did you expect to feel differently about the agreement made as a result of the meeting today?"

"Do you feel you were holding back and could have contributed more to the discussion?"

"Which topic we discussed do you feel was the most relevant?"

"Do you think that decision would benefit the organisation in the long run?"

"How do you feel you would have reacted if you were in the same situation?"

"Do you think the manager behaved in an appropriate manner?"

"Do you think the client would be happy with this sort of approach?"

“Do you expect the meeting today will be able to resolve some difficulties?”

“Do you think that the fault lies at the marketing department’s door?”

“Did you feel there was enough communication between the staff involved in this particular task?”

“Do you feel that you performed your duties to the best of your ability on this task?”

“Who do you feel should have taken responsibility in that situation?”

“Do you feel you and your team were adequately prepared for dealing with this situation?”

“Do you feel there are any changes you could have made?”

“Do you feel you will be able to provide an impartial view on this subject?”

“How would you have felt as a customer, receiving the same sort of service?”

Questions: Soliciting More Information

These questions can help you extract more information from the speaker. They allow the speaker to elaborate and explain in more detail points you have acknowledged as of particular importance. A good facilitator will know when the participant's answer did not have enough focus, and so know when to solicit more from them.

You can also ask if anybody else feels they can expand on what the participant has just said, so keeping a nice flow to the meeting and also encouraging more participant involvement and interaction.

Example questions:

"Can you be more specific?"

"Can you expand on that point?"

"Tell me more"

"Can you elaborate more on that point?"

"Do you have anything else to add?"

"Could you go on?"

"Were you holding back on anything?"

"Could you focus upon your first point more?"

"Is that the only information you have?"

"Were you informed of anything else worthy of note?"

"Is that as much as you know on that subject?"

"Would you care to share more on this subject?"

"Are you willing to share anymore?"

"Is that as far as your knowledge goes?"

"If you were pushed for an answer, what would you say?"

"Can you improve on the points you just made?"

"Can anybody else add anything to this?"

"Does anyone else think they can add to this?"

"Does anyone else share these views and feel they can contribute?"

"Anything else you can think of which is particularly memorable or remarkable?"

“Is that everything you intended to say?”

“Have you expressed all the views you have on that subject?”

“Have you said all you can on that issue?”

“Let’s take what you said and expand some more, shall we?”

“Could you explain in a little more detail?”

“You told me you were struggling to offer a definitive answer before, have you reached a conclusion now?”

“Could I press you on that issue a little bit more, if you wouldn’t mind?”

Questions: Identifying Extremes

These questions help you understand the potential opportunities in the meeting. They allow you, as the facilitator, to test the outer limits of participants' wants and needs. You can gain perspective on what participants identify as being positives or negatives and advantages or disadvantages with relevance to particular aspects of the current situation.

Example questions:

"What's the best thing about receiving a new computer?"

"What's the worst thing about the new equipment?"

"What's the best experience you have had in the time you've been with the organisation?"

"What's the worst thing about working in the finance department?"

"What's the best outcome that you can see from this meeting taking place?"

"Do you feel you were prepared for both the best and worst during the evaluation of the company's performance?"

"Do you feel you have been allowed to demonstrate your strengths in the assignments you have completed for the organisation?"

"Who do you feel would have performed this task the best?"

"Which would you say was your favourite method of working, to complete this task?"

"Which aspect of your role within the company would you say you enjoy the most?"

"Which responsibility that you have undertaken do you feel is your least favourite?"

"What do you think were the advantages the organisation identified when they decided to use this operating system?"

"What disadvantages have you found occur when working with an overseas customer?"

"What do you feel has been your highest achievement since joining the company?"

"Would you say there are disadvantages to working in a team on your current task?"

"What did you identify as the main advantage in using that specific operating system?"

"How much positive impact do you feel you were about to input into the project?"

"Were there any negatives that outshone the positives during your time at the organisation?"

“Were there any areas where the team you were working with particularly excelled?”

“Were there any areas where the team had to acknowledge a complete failure?”

“Do you feel that this method of facilitation has been the most successful you have been involved in?”

Questions: Indirect

Indirect questions help people express more sensitive information that they would normally be less inclined to reveal. You offer the participant a statement that already expresses an opinion, and then ask them if they agree. The participant will straight away feel more comfortable revealing their own opinions in the knowledge that there is a potential consensus view.

Example questions:

“Some people find that the computer training that the organisation offers the staff is not substantial enough. Can you relate to that concern?”

“Some people find that the employees’ concerns and opinions are not listened to by the management enough. How does that sound to you?”

“There is some concern about how well the staff communicate with one another. Do you believe there is a cause for this concern?”

“Some people have expressed a view that the client did not behave in a reasonable manner. How far would you agree with that point?”

“There has been talk of a change in training and development procedures at the organisation. Do you recognise a need for this change?”

“There has been a lot of positive feedback from customers about the proposed ideas for new products. Do you identify with this positive feeling?”

“There is a lot of belief that the client was more than happy with the service we provided. Do you share this belief?”

“Some people have admitted to being worried about the amount of productivity that is expected of the staff. Do you share this worry?”

“There have been views expressed that suggest the operating system used by the organisation was the downfall in this particular project. How much do you identify with these views?”

“The views expressed during the meeting suggest that we have a common goal, how far would you go in saying you agree with this statement?”

“Some have found that management have bypassed the issue of a healthy work life balance, do you feel the whole organisation would perform better with a heavier focus on this?”

“The issues we have sorted today will be beneficial all over the organisation according to the line manager; would you say that’s fair?”

“Others in the group have suggested that the meeting has been very helpful and that we should schedule one to take place every quarter, do you think that would be of benefit to yourself?”

“A good deal has been made of the fuss surrounding the new line manager; do you think he’s going to have a positive impact on the organisation?”

“Taking into account the worries others have confessed about the new recruiting system, can you be honestly say your mind is at ease with the system?”

“After listening to the positive opinion the rest of the group has given, do you think that an effective communications course would be appropriate for the organisation?”

“I feel there has been a generalised view displayed today. It points to the fact that there has been nowhere near enough communication between the marketing department and the Human Resources department. How would you propose to improve this process?”

Questions: Identifying Ideal Solutions

These are questions designed to help you, the facilitator, explore people's true desires. They work by temporarily removing obstacles and barriers from the participant's mind. They allow the participant to express what their actions would be if they had complete control and no restrictions. Factors such as time frames and budgets are purposely removed from the question to allow the participants to express freely their thoughts and feelings.

Example questions:

"In the absence of time and money constraints, what sort of computer system would you design for the department?"

"If you had both an unlimited time frame and unlimited resources, what sort of employee training programme would you implement?"

"If the company placed you in charge of the organisation's recruitment process and said that time and money were not issues, what changes would you make to improve its efficiency?"

"If you could go back in time, do you think you would have behaved in the same way, knowing the outcome of your actions?"

"If we were to say that time and money were no boundary, do you think that an unlimited time frame and budget would alter the decision you made in the first place?"

"If you could swap places with one of your employees for a week, do you think you would be able to get better results?"

"If you could see things through the eyes of the client, would you feel safe in the knowledge that the organisation is working to the best of its ability?"

"If you were given complete control of the company for a week, what would you change?"

"If you could facilitate this meeting yourself, would you focus on the same issues we have today?"



Reading this online? Click the image above for more information on *Effective Meeting Facilitation*


active presence

info@activepresence.com

www.activepresence.com

 +44 151 625 4655

Active Presence is a niche communications consultancy that improves B2B communication.

Specialising in *Confident Persuasive Presenting* and *Delivering Memorable PowerPoint*, our bespoke communication programmes give you the confidence to perform more effectively, outstrip your competition and win more business. *Effective Meeting Facilitation* enables you to better engage while keeping your projects on schedule and within budget.

Working from fully equipped studios in NW England and using the very latest technology, our online learning environment, YouRecall, provides a unique delivery platform that adds real value to your organisation in a pragmatic and structured way.

Managing Director, Chris Davidson, is a respected speaker, broadcaster and author. In 2010 his book, *Successful Speaking Secrets Quick Reference*, won the International Book Award in Los Angeles. With more than 10 years' experience helping businesses to better communicate, Chris can provide customised training and development for all areas of presenting.

Get in touch today for a programme tailored to your needs.