

Basic Facilitation Skills

***Always establish Community Agreements that everyone can feel comfortable with and check each other on:**

Example: "Step up, Step back," "Confidentiality," "RE-SPECT," "Use I statements," "Attack ideas not individuals"

Everyone should have basic facilitation skills, such as:

- Active Listening
- Knowing how to ask questions
- Paraphrasing
- Clarifying
- Summarizing

Active Listening:

Active listening is the intent of "listening for meaning" in which the listener checks with the speaker to see that a statement has been correctly heard and understood. The goal of active listening is to improve mutual understanding. It is a structured way of listening and responding.

When using active listening, be sure to:

- Observe the other person's behavior and body language.
- Be able to paraphrase the speaker's words to show your understanding and reaffirm that the person is being listened to.
- You can also ask questions for more clarification.
- In emotionally charged communications, the listener may listen for feelings. Thus, rather than merely repeating what the speaker has said, the active listener might describe the underlying emotion. ("you seem to feel angry" or "you seem to feel frustrated, is that because...?").

VERBAL TECHNIQUES are used to facilitate discussion, bring group consensus, and help manage confusion or conflict. Such as...

Asking Well-timed questions:

Open-ended questions encourage people to talk, to supply ideas, and to react to information and to explore the issues more deeply

Examples: What is your reaction? What are other alternatives? What suggestions do you have?

Close-ended questions: Use them with caution. Many times they are used to provide closure to a conversation and can be used to steer the conversation in a needed direction.

Examples: Do you all agree with this? Are we ready to move on? Is everyone will to support this decision?

Probing:

- Used to find out more information, to deepen the conversation or to jump-start the discussion.
- Get to the root of the problem .
- Explore concerns that may be overlooked .
- Uncover key facts.
- Increase creativity and open-mindedness
- Open the group to more honest sharing of information.

Paraphrasing: Restating what a person has said to clarify an idea or message or to check on the group's understanding.

PARAPHRASING

WHY

- *Paraphrasing* is fundamental to active listening. It is the most straightforward way to demonstrate to a speaker that his or her thoughts were heard and understood.
- The power of *paraphrasing* is that it is nonjudgmental and, hence, validating. It enables people to feel that their ideas are respected and legitimate.
- *Paraphrasing* provides the speaker with a chance to hear how his or her ideas are being heard by others.
- *Paraphrasing* is especially useful on occasions when a speaker's statements are convoluted or confusing. At such times, it serves as a check for clarification, as in, "Is this what you mean?" followed by the paraphrase.
- In sum, *paraphrasing* is the tool of choice for supporting people to think out loud.

HOW

- In your own words, say what you think the speaker said.
- If the speaker's statement contains one or two sentences, use roughly the same number of words when you paraphrase.
- If the speaker's statement contains many sentences, summarize it.
- To strengthen the group's trust in your objectivity, occasionally preface your paraphrase with a comment like one of these:
 - "It sounds like you're saying . . ."
 - "Let me see if I'm understanding you . . ."
 - "Is this what you mean?"
- When you have completed the paraphrase, look for the speaker's reaction. Say something like, "Did I get it?" Verbally or nonverbally, the speaker will indicate whether s/he feels understood. If not, *keep asking for clarification until you understand what s/he meant.*

STACKING

WHY

- *Stacking* is a procedure for helping people take turns when several people want to speak at once.
- *Stacking* lets everyone know that they are, in fact, going to have their turn to speak. So instead of competing for airtime, people are free to listen without distraction.
- In contrast, when people don't know when or even whether their turn will come, they can't help but vie for position. This leads to various expressions of impatience and disrespect, especially interruptions.
- Facilitators who do not stack have to pay attention to the waving of hands and other nonverbal messages that say, "I'd like to speak, please." Inevitably, some members are skipped or ignored. With *stacking*, a facilitator creates a sequence that includes all those who want to speak.

HOW

- *Stacking* is a four-step procedure. First, the facilitator asks those who want to speak to raise their hands. Second, s/he creates a speaking order by assigning a number to each person. Third, s/he calls on people when their turn to speak arrives. Fourth, after the final speaker, the facilitator asks if anyone else wants to speak. If so, the facilitator starts another stack. Here's a demonstration:
- Step 1. "Would all who want to speak, please raise your hands."
- Step 2. "Tyrone, you're first. Deb, you're second. James, you're third."
- Step 3. [*When Tyrone has finished*] "Who was second? Was it you, Deb? Okay, go ahead."
- Step 4. [*After the last person has spoken*] "Who'd like to speak now? Are there any more comments?" Then, start a new stack, and repeat Steps 2 through 4.

VALIDATING

WHY

- *Validating* is the skill that legitimizes and accepts a speaker's opinion or feeling, without agreeing that the opinion is "correct."
- Many facilitators wonder whether it is possible to support the expression of a controversial opinion without appearing to take sides. Can we acknowledge someone's feelings without implying we agree with the speaker's rationale for feeling that way?
- The answer is yes. *Validating* means *recognizing* a group's divergent opinions, not taking sides with any one of them.
- Just as you don't have to agree with an opinion to paraphrase it, you do not have to agree that a feeling is justified in order to accept and validate it.
- The basic message of *validating* is, "Yes, clearly that's one way to look at it. Others may see it differently; even so, your point of view is entirely legitimate."

HOW

- *Validating* has three steps. First, paraphrase. Second, assess whether the speaker needs added support. Third, offer the support.
- Step 1. Paraphrase or draw out a person's opinion or feeling.
- Step 2. Ask yourself, "Does this person need extra support? Has he or she just said something that takes a risk?"
- Step 3. Offer that support by acknowledging the legitimacy of what the person just said. For example:
 - "I see what you're saying."
 - "I know just how that feels."
 - "I get why this matters to you."
 - "I can see how you got there."
 - "Now I see where you're coming from."
- *Validating* often induces the affected individual to open up and say more. If this happens, be respectful. You're not agreeing; you're supporting someone to express their truth.