

TEAM MEETING HELP

Facilitating Dynamic Discussion

The key to facilitating dynamic discussions is generating the right kinds of questions and offering appropriate responses. Here are some guidelines for the kinds of questions and responses that would help your team engage in meaningful, challenging discussions.

Questions

1. *Opening Questions:*

Use an opening question to help the group warm up to each other, get to know one another better, and to let them hear their own voices. Opening questions are speculative and thought-engaging.

Examples:

- A. "What do you look forward over the next five years?"
- B. "Who is a person who has made a positive impact in your life?"

Close-ended questions vs. Open Questions

- 1. Close-ended questions are questions of fact!
- 2. Close-ended questions can be answered yes or no.
- 3. Close-ended questions are either right or wrong.
- 4. Close-ended questions fish for correct answers and can make you feel manipulated.

2. *Launching Questions*

Knowing the goal of the discussion, the group leader prepares launching questions designed to generate group interaction and feedback. These questions are designed to answer the question, "What do I know, what do I feel, what should I do?"

Examples:

- A. "What do we learn from seeing the obstacles Joseph faced and how we overcome them?!"
- B. "After our discussion, we probably all agree that we are somewhat 'stuck'.
"What steps can we take to develop a greater trust in each other?"
- C. "What do you think was going through Peter's mind at this time?"

Focused *launching questions:*

Some questions do not necessarily launch a question, but they do solicit responses and feedback. There are two kinds -- leading and limiting questions.

Leading questions usually produce a short answer. Such as:

- A. "Would you be tempted in this situation?"
- B. "Do you agree or disagree with this statement?"

Limiting Questions: indicate that you have a specific answer in mind. Although they do not promote discovery they do help clarify facts.

Examples:

- A. "What three commands do we find in this passage?"
- B. "What two things does Paul say we must do?"

Guiding Questions: Even the most well-prepared leader will need to spontaneously guide discussion at times.

Examples:

- A. Rephrase the question: "You seem to be asking, 'How can we develop trust as a group?'"
- B. Personalize the question: "How would you respond to Jesus if had asked that question?"

Summarizing Questions: Allows the leader to acknowledge group members' contributions while maintaining biblical integrity and direction.

Examples:

- A. An affirming comment can be made with good eye contact and a smile by saying, "Thanks for sharing that" or, "That's a good point" or, "OK, that is a response worth considering: are there other thoughts as well?"
- B. A summarizing response might say, "So what we see in this passage is. . ."

Applying Questions: Allows the leader to apply what they have learned by asking questions

The goal of the small group study is not just information but transformation.

Examples:

- A. "What will you do this week as a result of our discussion tonight?"
- B. "What difference does this make to you and me?"

TEAM MEETING HELP

ACTIVE LISTENING

Involves not only what you hear, but also what you say. It means actively engaging with the person who is speaking. It means setting aside your personal agenda and keeping yourself from distracting thoughts (particularly thinking about what you are going to say next). Here are some tips for active listening:

What you say

1. Invite comments from the group.
2. Empathize with people's emotions.
3. Explore their statements, seeking more information.
4. Clarify what has been said.

What you hear

1. Verbal: the content of what is said. Sometimes we are so interested in what we are about to say that we fail to hear the simple facts in a discussion. As you listen, focus on people's names, events, dates, and other specific information that is being shared.
2. Non-verbal: how the content is expressed. Here you are listening for "congruity". That is, do the non-verbal messages match the verbal messages? You "listen" for this in three areas:
 - Facial expressions - When someone says, "I'm OK", does their facial expression actually communicate, "I'm a little sad"?
 - Tone of voice – Listen for tones of sarcasm, anger, sadness, enthusiasm, hesitancy, fear, etc
 - Body movements, posture - Are arms and legs crossed and closed? Are people fidgety? Are people relaxed? Does their posture indicate interest or boredom? Remember, you can "hear" a lot just by watching people's actions.

Responses:

How you and other members respond to questions or statements will either foster or fizzle a discussion.

Poor Initial Responses:

1. A Question
2. A Cliché
3. An Interpretation
4. Reassurance
5. A Bible Verse
6. Abandonment/Ignoring
7. Emotionally Flat

Very Good Responses:

1. Repeat -- The key words "uh-huh," "oh," and "mmm" can often say more than words. They can communicate "I am with you, I want to understand this."
2. Reflect - The key phrase or feeling with interchangeable words that the speaker would accept as what he or she intended to say.
3. Support -- A word of support can free the other to feel their feelings and face their real thoughts. It may help them feel that their feelings are validated. Comments like "sounds like you have a good reason to be angry," "That must have hurt," "That's got to be hard to live with" can be helpful.
4. Silence -- Can be a gift that communicates "You are free to speak or not to speak. I value you enough to wait and just be here with you."

TEAM MEETING HELP

TROUBLE SHOOTING A MEN'S TEAM

Creating safe places where life-change can be maximized is not easy. Sometimes it's reassuring to know that all small groups undergo some type of relational difficulty. If group members expect to grow, people will have to be vulnerable. Anyone who has ever led or been a part of a nurturing small group will tell you that where people are emotionally transparent, problems will come to the surface. When they do, it's the leaders job to help steer the group in the right direction.

Two principles guide our attempts at successful "troubleshooting." First, any solution must promote the health and wholeness of the individual. Second, any resolution must also promote the health and wholeness of the total group.

The following "Troubleshooting Tips" were garnered in part from discussions with leaders. They should go a long way in helping your groups deal with "problem" situations with grace and insight. Remember, no technique is 100% successful in solving the crisis your team may encounter, but with prayerful attention, sensitivity, and caring interaction using one or more of these "tips," your group has a good chance of not only making it through your particular barrier, but realizing true camaraderie and maturity on the other side of it.

ISSUE: The Overly Talkative Member

Often what begins as a trickle of friendly patter can turn into a virtual flood of words if not moderated properly. The "Talker" is rarely shy, and usually very uncomfortable with long periods of silence. Typically, what's behind this need to "fill in" the pauses is the fear of intimacy or personal disclosure. The Talker is very quick to move on an item, and can very easily unsettle a group's pacing if there is not some type of sensitive intervention. Here are some tools that you might find helpful.

Establish Ground Rules for Your Team

- Make (or reiterate) the rule that no one can overrun someone else while they are speaking (translation: "NO INTERRUPTING!").
- Go systematically around the group allowing each person a chance to talk. Remember at the onset to be of members who are either unaccustomed to or feel uncomfortable with speaking in a group setting.
- Assure the talkative member privately that you value his opinions, but that you wish to hear other men's comments as well. You may want to state in front of the group that you would like to hear more about this man's items of interest after the meeting.

- During the discussion, simply interject and sensitively direct a question to another person.

Meet Individually

- Spend some one-on-one time with the "Talker." Attempt to ascertain the driving issues that are making it necessary for the person to dominate the meeting.
- Firmly and sensitively confront the person in private. Begin with the positive contributions the person has made in the group and the need for others to be given the opportunity to make a similar impact. Use the confrontation time as an important affirmation moment as well.
- Ask the talkative person's help in drawing others out. Suggest he end his comments with a question like, "So what do the rest of you think?"

ISSUE: The Answer Man

"The Answer Man" can all too quickly dismantle safe places. Other members should not have to experience the pain of non-attention, judgment, or an argumentative spirit. Here are some helpful ways to provide what the answer man needs and keep the group process on track.

Take Action During The Meeting

- Backtrack to the original idea, question, or thought shared.
- Refocus on the passage or material being used and collect more information from everyone, then summarize.
- Loving redirect the sharing to the other group members: "What do the rest of you think of this passage?" or "How do the rest of you feel?"
- Affirm what is right about the "always right" person's answers, but look for other points of view.
- Be a model of true empathy yourself so the "answer person" can see a better way to help others.
- Remind the group of the importance of silence.
- Avoid arguing about who is right or wrong.
- Before the meeting, share how "pat" answers or oversimplified responses make others feel. Ask the group to monitor themselves. Do not feel afraid

to call members on this after you have set the ground rules.

- Direct the group to prayer generally and for one another.

Speak to the "Answer Man"

- If it's a continuing problem, talk with the person outside the group. Describe to them what their sharing in this manner does to the group. Tell the truth with compassion.
- Affirm the person for what they do know, but also let them know how their knowledge may not be what is needed or appropriate.
- Let the person know they need to let the communication of others stand on its own without judgment or immediate correction.
- Ask the insensitive member to share more feelings rather than thoughts ("I think...")
- Ask the "answer person" to summarize or rephrase points of the discussion.
- Attempt to find out from the person privately what drives him to always appear "in the know."