

The Leader as Behavioral Model

In attempting to facilitate participant involvement, there are a number of specific facilitator behaviors which can help you meet your objectives.

When you think about your own experiences as a participant, it's not unusual to remember as much about the facilitator as about the session content. This is because behaviors modeled by a facilitator can have a powerful impact on group and individual performance. In fact, participants are likely to discount the quality and usefulness of the session content if the facilitator behavior is inconsistent with the values and/or behaviors being promoted.

Facilitative Behaviors

1. Maintain and enhance the self-esteem of participants

For most participants, the motivation to participate can be increased by creating a climate that boosts the participants' confidence. There are a number of ways of accomplishing this, including:

- Listen to ideas
- Acknowledge all ideas
- Turn questions back to the group
- Record all ideas, using their own words, and make them visible by posting the flip chart sheets
- Refer to previous comments by using speaker's name
- Ask for examples from the group's own experience
- Look for and point out merit even in inappropriate answers
- Avoid arguments and making right/wrong judgments
- Show enjoyment of the participants
- Focus on participants' concerns
- Express confidence in the group
- Give complete reasons for directions
- share information
- Keep notes and live up to follow-up commitments
- Give constructive feedback and build behaviors through positive reinforcement.

2. Focus on participant's behavior and not on personality

Participants respond more productively when their behavior is discussed than when references are made to their personality or attitudes. The following will help you focus on behavior:

- Ask for specific examples of general or judgmental statements.

- Use examples when presenting an idea.
- Ask, "In what way?", or, "I'm not sure I understand your point".
- Ask for evidence. Whether praise or criticism, don't accept generalities. Ask for specifics.
- When offering praise, explain why.

3. Actively listen and show understanding

In active listening, the facilitator accepts what is being said without making any value judgments, clarifies the feelings being expressed, and reflects this back to the participant. Situations in which active listening can be particularly helpful, or even critical include:

- When a participant is being uncooperative, or overly critical.
- When a participant's comment is unclear and confusing.
- When participants keep changing the issue being discussed.
- When a participant is rambling or "grandstanding".
- When a participant's remark is important to the group's learning.
- When a participant disagrees with a suggested process, or the direction that the discussion is taking.

4. Use reinforcement to shape learning

Participant behaviors that are rewarded tend to be repeated and strengthened.

Reinforcing is a 3-step process:

1. Identify the specific, observable behavior.
2. Explain what effect the behavior had on the session process.
3. Indicate your positive feelings about the behavior.

Verbal and non-verbal reinforcing behaviors:

- Refer back to participant's ideas or examples.
- Use people's names whenever possible.
- Paraphrase or write on flip-charts in the participant's words rather than your own.
- Nodding of the head.
- Making eye contact and smiling.
- Moving closer to the participant as they respond.

It is essential for facilitators to be able to model the behaviors they are requesting of participants. One of the significant differences between effective and ineffective facilitation is the effectiveness of the facilitator as a behavioral model.