

The
SECRETS
to
Questioning

Adapted from *The Secrets of Facilitation*

The Leadership Strategies Institute

56 Perimeter Center East, Suite 103

Atlanta, Georgia 30346

(770) 454-1440

www.leadstrat.com

Copyright © *Leadership Strategies, Inc.* 2004

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of *Leadership Strategies*.

QUESTIONING SKILLS

Why is it important for you to have superb questioning skills?

THE PRINCIPLES SUMMARIZED

Principle 1. PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

Cover All the Bases

Principle 2. GETTING THE SESSION STARTED

Inform, Excite, Empower, Involve

Principle 3. FOCUSING THE GROUP

Establish the Course, Avoid Detours

Principle 4. RESPECTING THE POWER OF THE PEN

Use It, Don't Abuse It, Make It Theirs

Principle 5. INFORMATION GATHERING

Know Your Tools and How to Use Them

Principle 6. MANAGING DYSFUNCTION

Conscious Prevention, Early Detection, Clean Resolution

Principle 7. CONSENSUS BUILDING

Generate a Consensus-Focused Process

Principle 8. KEEPING THE ENERGY HIGH

Set the Pace, Anticipate Lulls, React Accordingly

Principle 9. CLOSING THE SESSION

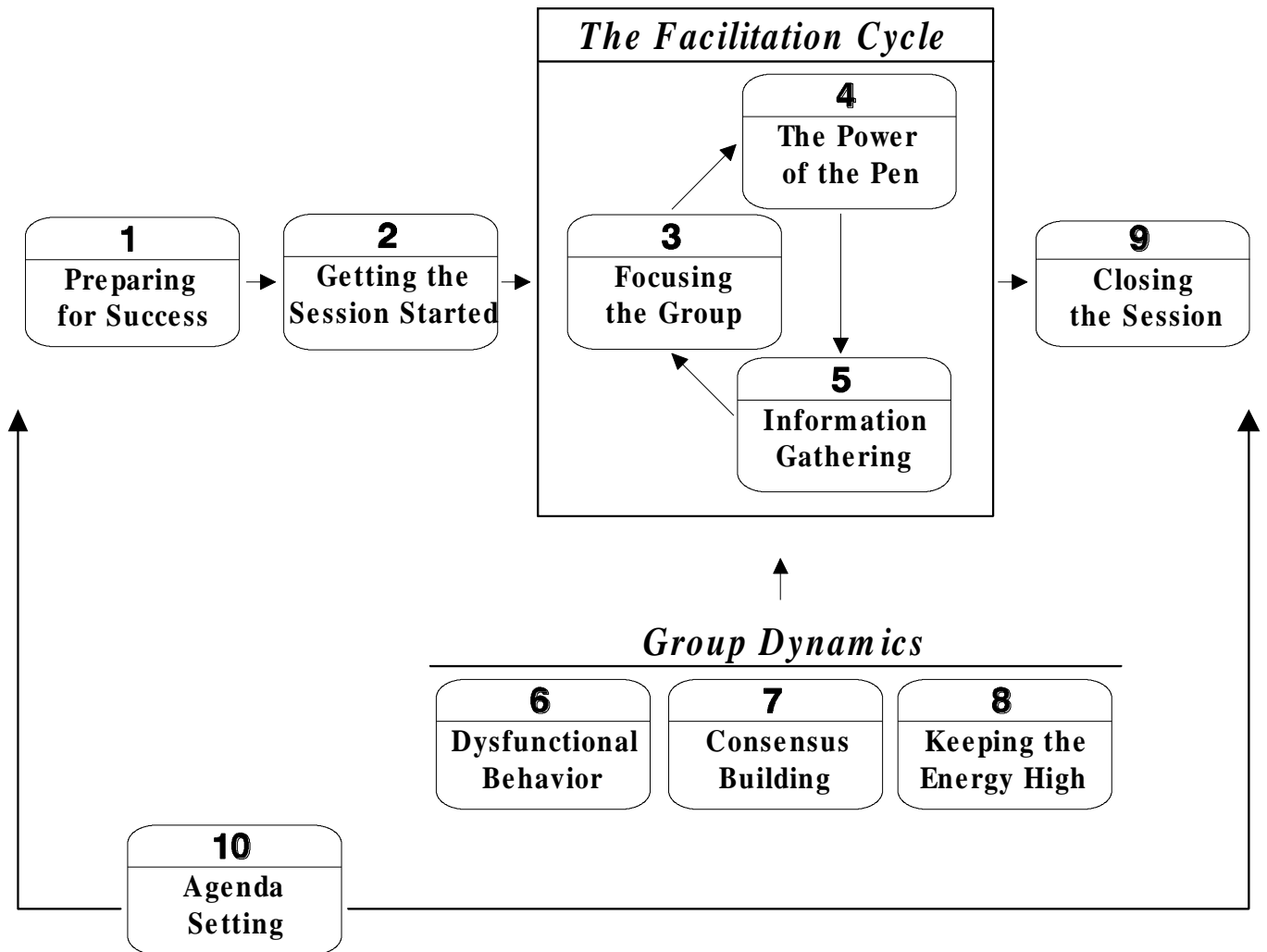
Review, Evaluate, Close, Debrief

Principle 10. AGENDA SETTING

Adapt Your Agenda to Address the Need

The Facilitator's Methodology™

The Leadership Strategies Approach For Structuring Successful Group Sessions



Our Agenda

- A. Starting Questions
- B. Reacting Questions
- C. Drilling Down
- D. SSRing Problem Statements
- E. Funneling Evaluation Statements

A. Starting Questions

?

Which is the better starting question? Why?

You are interviewing a group of school registrars to talk with them about the scheduling process.

Question Type A

The first thing we want to talk about are inputs.
What are the inputs to the scheduling process?

Question Type B

If you were about to develop the school schedule,
what is the information you would need to have
close by?

Ask great starting questions to start each agenda item

- For most agenda items, there is a time when the facilitator stops speaking and the participants begin providing information. The question the facilitator asks prior to the participants responding is called the "starting question."
- Great starting questions draw a "vivid image" that prepare the participants to respond.

- Step 1: Start with an image building phrase:
 - "Think about . . . "
 - "Imagine . . . "
 - "If . . . "
 - "Consider . . ."
- Step 2: Expand the image
- Step 3: Ask the "Type A" Question

Exercise: Starting Questions

Form type-A and type-B questions:

- Personal objectives for the class
- Steps in the current hiring process
- Problems with the current hiring process
- Potential improvements to the hiring process

B. Reacting Questions

Type	Purpose	Example
Direct Probe	Challenge or Probe <i>You don't think what was said is correct or you need additional explanation</i>	Why is that important? What causes that? How do you mean?
Indirect Probe	Probe/Clarify <i>Additional explanation, especially appropriate for less-confident participants</i>	Is the reason that's important because...? (closed ended, gives the answer)
Redirection	Get back on track <i>The point is not relevant to the current discussion</i>	That's a good point. Can we put that on the issues list?
Playback	Confirm <i>Give the speaker assurance that you understood the point</i>	It sounds like what you are saying is...is that right? Is what you are saying is...
Leading Question	Lead to other thoughts <i>You want to guide the group to other solutions</i>	Are there solutions in the area of...? What other alternatives are there? Is there a way to achieve this and that too?
Prompt Question	Keep the ideas flowing <i>The group has temporarily stalled and needs prompting</i>	What else.... We have [x], [y], [z], what others are there?
Tag Question	Get acknowledgment <i>You are warming up the group, or keeping it alert</i>	That's important, isn't it?
Float an Idea	Give a possible solution <i>A potentially suitable solution has been overlooked</i>	What about...? What are the benefits...?

Exercise: Using the Toolkit

Be sure to listen closely to the facilitators statement, then ask a full question based on the order below. (See examples)

Statement		Full Question
<i>“Facilitation is an important skill for managers today.”</i>	Direct Probe	Why is facilitation an important skill for managers today?
<i>“Because tactics of the past – like dictating in detail what workers are to do – are no longer acceptable. Workers want to be involved and want to have input.”</i>	Indirect Probe	Is the reason you believe workers want to have input is so they have a greater feeling of ownership of the result?
	Redirection	
	Playback	
	Leading Question	
	Prompt Question	
	Tag Question	
	Float an Idea	

New Beginning: *“Every facilitator should belong to an organization like the IAF.”*

C. Drilling Down

When disagreements occur in a discussion, frequently the disagreement is due to a poor understanding of why each person supports his/her position. As facilitators, our job is to move the discussion away from the positions and drill down to the real issues.

Optimist: I believe the best alternative to solving this problem is to pull a team of people together, let them develop a consensus solution and present it to management for approval.

Nay-sayer: That's a bad idea.

Optimist: No it isn't. In my old company, we've tried this same strategy on numerous issues with considerable success.

Nay-sayer: Nope. That stuff may work elsewhere, but not here. Not a chance.

Optimist: I don't understand why you are being so negative.

Nay-sayer: I'm not being negative. I'm just telling you like it is. That won't work.

?

How could a facilitator have aided in this disagreement?

As facilitators we know that, when disagreements occur, often the appropriate response is to **seek understanding by drilling down to the source of the disagreement**. If someone believes something is a “bad idea,” the facilitator’s goal is to ensure that the group has a chance to understand why. Let’s try this discussion again.

Drilling Down

Optimist: I believe the best alternative to solving this problem is to pull a team of people together, let them develop a solution and present it to management for approval.

Nay-sayer: That’s a bad idea.

Facilitator: You may very well be right. Help us understand, why do you believe it’s a bad idea?

Nay-sayer: Two years ago we wasted six days in team meetings around improving the hiring process and management didn’t implement a thing.

Facilitator: What do you believe is the reason management didn’t implement a thing?

Nay-sayer: They said they didn’t see the benefit.

Optimist: Well it sounds like if we do this team approach, we will have to make sure that we get management’s commitment up front to implement our recommendations if we can demonstrate adequate benefit.

Nay-sayer: I doubt if they will be willing to give that commitment. But if they do, I’m willing to call their bluff.

D. “SSR-ing” Problem Statements

When you hear a key problem, attempt to “SSR” it by identifying the **size, symptom, and root cause**.

Example of SSR-ing a Problem Statement

- Sponsor: One of our problems is that we waste unnecessary dollars on want-ad advertising.
- Facilitator: **About how much** are you spending? (**size**)
- Sponsor: About \$10,000 a month.
- Facilitator: That is a lot. **How do you know** it is wasted? (**symptom**)
- Sponsor: Most of the jobs are filled in-house through our job posting system.
- Facilitator: **Why** is advertising done if most jobs are filled in-house? (**root cause**)
- Sponsor: I think one of our personnel policies requires that a job be widely advertised for some number of days before we fill the position.

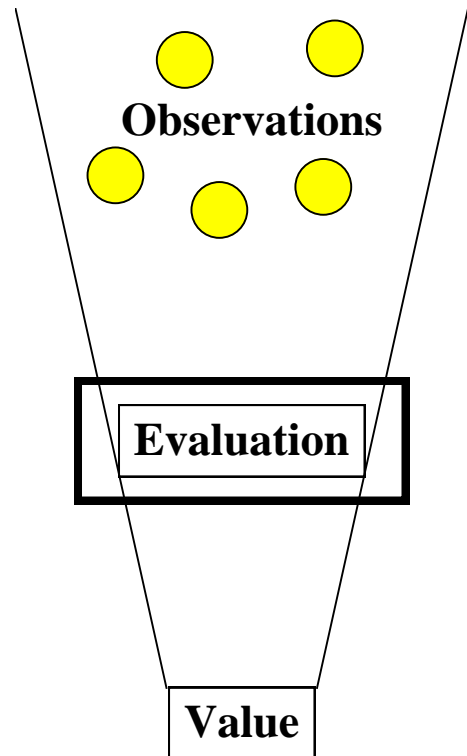
?

Why is it important to SSR a problem?

E. Funneling Evaluation Statements

When you hear an evaluation statement, **probe for observations** that support the evaluation, and **identify the underlying values**. Evaluation statements include:

- “It did not work very well”
- “It was the best job ever done”
- “I liked it”
- “He’s not too smart”



Example of Probing an Evaluation Statement

Sponsor: We had a Facilitator in last year looking at this same process, but he wasn't very good.

Facilitator: Really? **What was it** that he did or didn't do that made him not that good? (**observations**)

Sponsor: He didn't have a methodology. He never came to a meeting with an agenda. He just seemed to wing it. My boss got frustrated and we didn't ask him back after the third meeting.

Facilitator: *Writes note to himself: The sponsor values organization. Communicate plan from start.*

Leadership Strategies, Inc.

The Facilitation Company

Leadership Strategies provides organizations with **professional facilitators** who lead sessions in strategic planning, process improvement, issues resolution, and information needs analysis. Our National Facilitator Database (NFDB.com) allows clients to find facilitators with the skills and experience they need. We also teach people to be facilitators of change through our **leadership training classes** in such areas as The Effective Facilitator, Managing Excellence, and Strategic Planning. We make it our business to research the best practices used by successful organizations, compile these best practices into practical workshops and guide organizations in implementing these practices in their environments.

Our Services

Strategic Consulting

Avoid wasting value time! Our professional facilitators provide the expertise and techniques for focused retreats and planning sessions

Meeting Facilitation

Strategic Planning

Systems Analysis

Team Building

Issue Resolution

Process Improvement

We offer a free, one-hour briefing on "The Level-3 Organization". Call for information.

Leadership Training

Give your key people the training they need! Our dynamic instructors will provide your people with detailed tools and techniques for success.

Facilitation Series

Principles of Facilitation

The Effective Facilitator

Making Meetings Work!

Effective Teams Work!

Management Series

Managing Excellence

The Effective Consultant

The Effective Communicator

Effective Presentation Skills

Planning Series

Strategic Planning

Project Planning

Call about our monthly class schedule. Ask about classes we can teach on your site!

Leadership Strategies, Inc.

56 Perimeter Center East, Suite 103

Atlanta, Georgia 30346

(770) 454-1440

www.leadstrat.com
