

Meeting Effectiveness Techniques



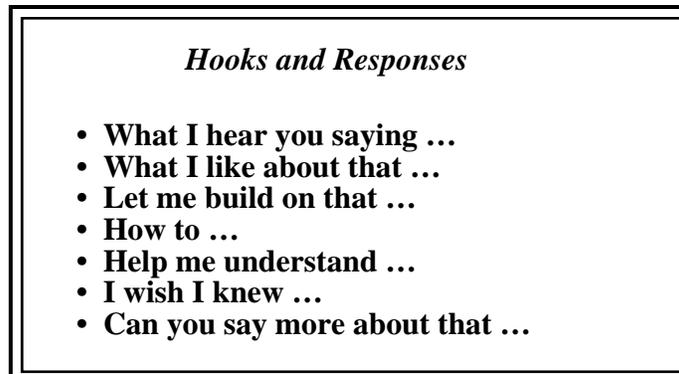
*This material is the intellectual property of the original author and is intended for the personal use of visitors to **NextForge.com**; this document may not be used for commercial purposes.*

*For an unrestricted copy for use inside your firm or with third-parties, please contact the author or **NextForge**.*

Avoiding Fatal Flaws and Negativism

Many meetings fail because they take on the “piranha syndrome” – look for a weakness and devour the presenter. Having found a weakness, the participants “fatal flaw” the whole idea or presentation: they come up with a long list of why something cannot be done, rather than look for positive ways to strengthen the idea.

One way to help avoid “fatal flawing” and other negativism is to structure questions and responses in a positive manner. The “Hooks and Responses” in the box below are designed to aid in this process.



By paraphrasing, saying what you like about something, or asking for help in understanding, you are validating the self-worth of the idea’s owner while still getting your concerns, wishes, or needs considered. A positive approach encourages idea generation and enhances creativity. The process of sharing ideas, building on them, and reaching a joint solution has a positive team-building effect. Attendees become a part of the process, even if they do not actively participate.

This team-building has far-reaching effects outside of the meeting. It helps to create a spreading network of support for decisions and actions and to produce a support base for implementation activities.

Keeping on Track during the Meeting – Helpful Hints

<u>Behaviors/Problems</u>	<u>Corrective Actions</u>
Running Behind Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce group is behind time • Consider shortening material • Look out for digressions • Limit discussion on some points
Running a Long Time Behind Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine cause: letting discussion go off track or underestimating the time for an agenda • Take some items off-line • Re-prioritize the agenda • Decide which items can be next steps or carried over to the next meeting
Processing During Information Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce that information sharing involves only questions of clarification • If an information-sharing item needs processing, make it an agenda item for later discussion
Going Around in Circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize the discussion • Note points on the flipchart • Assign next steps • Make a proposal for getting the meeting going again
Side Conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce positive meeting principles • Make an appropriate comment: “Let’s have only one meeting at a time”
Shutting Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have people make points in rotation; let those at the end of the queue know their turn will come • Remind a member who is shutting out others that it is important to hear from everyone
Dropping Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring the person in by asking a question or for an opinion on the topic being discussed
Evaluation Burning Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the rules of brainstorming

Keeping on Track (cont.)

<u>Behaviors/Problems</u>	<u>Corrective Actions</u>
Disruptive Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the various points of view • Define the areas of agreement • Identify sources of disagreement • Identify next steps to resolve differences • Determine if the discussion should be taken off-line
Disruptive Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confront the behavior in a firm but friendly manner • Focus on the behavior and its effect on the group; do not focus on the person or his/her personality • Suggest alternative behaviors: “Do you think you could hold the messages until break?” • Use non-verbal techniques (make eye contact, give dissatisfied glance) • Reinforce positive behavior • Talk privately to members who continually exhibit disruptive behaviors
Not Identifying Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post flip chart with: Item—Who—When • Follow up on action items at beginning of each meeting
Presentations Exceeding Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give message, not data • Give right amount and right level of detail • Use pictures instead of words • Make presentation with the time limit (practice)

Meeting Roles

Recognizing Roles in a Meeting

When a group of people get together to work on a problem, the number of roles they can play are almost unlimited. Instead of trying to talk about all of them, let's consider the ones *essential* to a good meeting.

1. **Initiating** – suggesting new ideas, problems, and activities for the group to work on. This doesn't mean disrupting activities going on, but suggesting new things to think about and do when the group is ready for them.
2. **Orienting** – making sure that the group knows exactly where it's going and why. This ensures that what the group is doing is in line with what it should be doing.
3. **Clarifying** – making sure that everything that is said and done is understood by all members of the group. Statements and actions may have to be restated or rephrased before they're clear to everyone.
4. **Integrating** – using all the facts and all the thinking of the group to come out with the answers that make sense to everyone. Ultimately the group will consider all sides of a question and try to arrive at an answer that combines the best points of everyone.
5. **Summarizing** – pulling together all the ideas that the group has been talking about, and showing their relationship to each other and to the whole issue being discussed.

Examples of Roles in Session

Here are some typical ways these roles are played. Note that they are often played incorrectly.

<u>Role</u>	<u>Right</u>	<u>Wrong</u>
Initiating	"It seems to me from what you fellows have been saying is that we ought to talk about the way we forecast production needs."	"Of course, what we have been talking about is important, but what I would like to talk about is how to handle older workers."
Orienting	"Last time we talked about who determines our advertising program. We decided that today we would discuss possible ways of improving this program."	"Now let's start the discussion off by deciding how to improve the advertising program."
Clarifying	"I take it that what you are saying is that you feel that the foremen and supervisors don't realize each other's problems."	I don't quite get what you mean but I guess we really shouldn't spend too much time on this point anyway."
Integrating	"Joe suggested that we have better rest room facilities. That seems to fit in with Pete's suggestions on morale."	"Well, let's decide what to do next. We don't seem to be able to agree."
Summarizing	"We considered how to discuss promotion policies, and then followed through by getting all the information we could on how the present practices evolved and what they are today."	"Well, I guess that's all for today."

Who Performs These Roles?

Most of us at one time or another have sat in a meeting and assumed these roles, but we have also sat in meetings where we didn't do anything. The time when all members of a meeting are expected to pitch in and do all the jobs necessary for solving a problem is usually after group members are used to meeting together, and are faced with a problem to which no one has the answer.

At the beginning of the meeting, you, as facilitator, are expected to play many of these roles. But we all know how boring listening can become. Increasing participation through using group members for gathering information is some help. But to really pep things up, the facilitator should remember that there are many sides to most questions, and that different points of view should be encouraged. If the facilitator can get group members to come out with them, the clarifying and integrating of these points of view can then be done out loud during the meeting. This can turn a dull meeting into an interesting session.

As rapidly as possible, the good meeting will move from a one-man show to one in which all members can get involved. This makes for more interesting and value added meetings and puts all the group's abilities to work on the subject. To get greater participation the facilitator must realize that they are not the only one who is able to play the needed roles, and that with the proper encouragement/coaching other group members will assume some of the responsibility.

Stimulating Participation

How Do You as a Facilitator Encourage Participation and Utilize Contributions?

One important aspect of group problem-solving is getting people to participate fully and freely. Only when a group has its maximum resources working on the problem can it be sure that the solution reached is the best possible.

How Do You Encourage Member Participation?

1. State your desire for it:

For example: "I think problems are solved best when the solution is a result of everyone's efforts. So I'd like all of us here to contribute our ideas and feelings on this problem."

2. State the problem and tell the group that they have the resources for solving it:

For example: "The reason you have been invited to this meeting is that you are the people who have had the experience necessary to solve this problem. Sue, you're from Standards and are familiar with the trouble with consistency. Jim, you're from ..."

3. Let the group know you mean what you say by refusing to solve the problem yourself or lead the group to a pre-arranged solution:

For example: "I really don't know the answer. That's why your help is needed. What do *you* think?"

4. Listen and try to understand what the group members are really saying:

For example: "Then what you are really saying is ... Is that correct?" "Joe, would you go through that again? I'm not quite sure we were able to follow you exactly"

Success in using these pointers depends on an honest desire to have group members participate in the meeting. If sincerity is lacking, the technique will be ineffective.

How Do You Use Member Contributions?

1. Make sure you and the other members of the group understand the contributions. That is, try hard to understand the essence of what is going on and being said. If the points do not clear up, ask for a restatement of what is meant.
2. Tie contributions into the on-going discussion when they do not fit in automatically. When a statement is vague, try to get at the essential element that is related to the on-going topic.
3. Ask if people are all discussing the same thing when comments seem to be irrelevant and no other person in the group suggests that they get back on track.
4. Let the group decide how to use or not to use the contributions of other members. Many times the group may see important points in the contributions which you have missed.
5. Accept all contributions as being of possible value until the group decides by words or actions that the contribution does not fit into the discussion.

What Difficulties May You Expect When Encouraging Contributions?

1. **Irregular progress.** Progress may not be as steady and well ordered as many would like.
2. **Reconciliation and delay.** It may be necessary to stop so as to reconcile contributions which result from different experiences. This process is often slow and frustrating.
3. **Determining the relevancy of a contribution.** It is often difficult for the group and for you to tell whether a contribution is really relevant or not. Relevancy can usually be established by requesting the contributor to expand on his idea or to explain it a little further.
4. **Understanding individual group members.** A group member often feels that his idea has not been understood by the facilitator or by other members of the group. We may think that we understand his idea when we really do not. The member must be satisfied that he has made his point clear. If he doesn't feel that he has, he may be unhappy and continue to bring it up until he is certain he has put it across. The difficulty may be that everyone does understand the point, but no one has conveyed this understanding to the individual.
5. **Facilitator impatience.** You may become impatient when the group fails to make progress that you think could be made if the group would just listen to you. The group, on the other hand, may feel very successful. This may leave you feeling incomplete, frustrated, and perhaps even angry.
6. **Learning – intangible but real.** There may be some feeling in the group that there is no learning taking place because no “expert” is telling the what's what. Much of the learning which results from the discussion method is not quickly recognized. You gain in many intangible ways, such as an added feeling of confidence, increased comfort in a social situation, and a feeling of accomplishment when a difficult problem is worked out. Learning of this type cannot be measured readily, as can the accumulation of a body of facts. Hence the group may feel that they really haven't learned much from the discussion.

Lessons Learned – *Facilitators' Helpful Hints*

A. When using flipcharts:

- Number each item and page
- Title pages
- Write legibly but fast (if you abbreviate, write out before end of meeting)
- Think about wall space before starting (amount to write on each flipchart, order alignment of taping flips on wall)
- Appoint chart hanger
- Test markers ahead and throw away “dead” ones
- Turn your back to audience as little as possible
- Dual scribes when appropriate
- Don't use red in positive statements
- Write what people say/thumbprint
- Use of color (yellow and sometimes orange not visible, vary colors to keep room lively)
- Cut tape ahead and place on the edge of easel opposite from where you stand (e.g., if you're right-handed, place on the right side)

B. Before session:

- Preposition meeting owner
- Agenda with times
- Right level people looking at right issues
- Preposition all people
- Find out group personalities from meeting owner
- Set up room correctly
- Starter-list of “good meeting behaviors” for brainstorming with the group at the meeting outset
- Clear understanding of what a “successful outcome” looks like
- Rehearse with meeting owner

C. When trying to encourage participation:

- Ensure eye contact with each individual
- Creatively use silence
- Watch non-verbals of participants
- Watch “over-extension of our group strengths”
- Never say “hope to”
- Find opportunities to praise

- Schedule “natural” breaks
- Use group to help control meeting
- Walk closer to trouble makers
- Get “bad guys” to do things
- Talk to audience, not flipcharts
- Popcorn pace idea generation
- Careful stage management
- Find opportunity to help struggling group member(s)
- Smile
- Try to get team to wake sleepers up
- Put multiple ideas in holding pattern
- Give one minute thinking time in silence
- “Touch” trouble-makers
- Watch time of day (energy levels)
- Initial/final scan
- Voice modulation/tone
- Ensure everyone is included

D. When in session:

- Stick to format/process
- Explain ground rules, time contracts, and role model
- Finish benefits and concerns (easy to want to skip)
- Be aware of killer phrases
- Underline key words in problem statement
- Keep problem statement visible
- Ask group to headline
- Check with meeting owner if ideas are meeting his/her expectations
- Step out of role of facilitator if necessary
- Appoint time keeper
- Post ground rules