

## INTRODUCTION

The word “facilitation” carries a variety of meanings based on the context in which it is used. The most common definition of “facilitate” is “to make easier—to move forward.” Given this definition, what is facilitation in the context of the training environment?

A facilitator’s role depends on the function of the group. It is the facilitator’s responsibility to help the group to meet its goals and objectives. Groups convene for a variety of purposes with facilitators at the helm to provide structure and direction. It is not uncommon to be part of a setting where a facilitator guides a group toward a particular purpose. Facilitators are called upon to provide information (traditional teacher role) and skill instruction (traditional trainer role), facilitate change (traditional therapist role), and guide decision making (traditional organization role).

While the function of groups calls for specific actions on the part of facilitators, a facilitator’s role goes well beyond the group function resting on a set of basic skills. This chapter focuses on basic facilitation skills as they relate primarily to a specific type of facilitator: the content expert as facilitator, a unique combination of teacher and trainer, the Ultimate Facilitator. You will explore responsive behaviors and general skills, including more specific skills in the areas of coordination, presentation, and facilitation important for Ultimate Facilitators.

## PARTICIPANT EXPECTATIONS

Participants often place high expectations on the abilities of facilitators. While it could be argued that the standard role of the facilitator calls for neutrality while supporting group values of democracy, cooperation, and shared responsibility, the reality is that participants in the training environment *expect* the facilitator to meet all their needs—from physical comfort and camaraderie to actual realization of their learning goals. Here is where the facilitator employs the magic to direct while being nondirective, to control while being noncontrolling, and to assist participants in learning the material without doing the learning for them. Be assured, the group will hold you accountable!

## DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

A general rule often stated in training circles is that it takes approximately eight hours of preparation time for each hour of actual delivery time of a new training program or session. Preparation time will obviously vary, depending on the trainer’s experience; level of expertise and previous conduct of the same or similar trainings; and familiarity with and knowledge about the expertise level of the participants. Whether this is time spent in preparing a lesson plan or assessing your participants, every bit of energy and every second spent in preparation will return benefits two-fold during the training session.

## KEY HOMEWORK ELEMENTS

- C *Know the goal.* While knowing the goals and objectives of the session are critical to the development of the lesson plan, facilitators often inherit a lesson plan they had no part in developing. Being clear on the goals of any training session is critical—as a guide and a contract.
- C *Know your participants.* Information concerning participants’ needs and knowledge assists the facilitator during training development and delivery. Learning strategies and the level of instruction can be designed and modified for specific learning styles. Remember, a principle of adult learning holds that adults are a rich resource for knowledge and experience; knowing your participants gives you the ability to tap that resource.
- C *Design the lessons.* Lesson design elements (however formally structured as a lesson plan) describe the standard way in which the instruction should be the *same*. In other words, the formal lesson plan contains the “content,” the parameters of knowledge necessary to accomplish the learning goal(s). The teaching strategies you choose to deliver the lesson plan describe how you will be *different*: the way you will “reach” your participants, the “process” of training. While a lesson plan (content) often remains the same from each training situation to the next, the process must be matched to the participants and session goals as well as to the unique style of the instructor.
- C *Develop learning materials.* Learning materials help the facilitator to meet training goals. Quality, well-structured learning materials (such as specific, content-tailored in-class exercises) reinforce learning and send the message that the facilitator values the participant.

## RESPONSIVE BEHAVIORS

. . . it’s the quality of teachers’ interactions that determine the degree of warmth—trust—rapport—openness—psychological safety in the classroom . . . — Khan & Weiss (1973)

Facilitators should strive to create an environment for maximum learning to occur. Basically, it is the way facilitators respond to participants that creates a healthy learning environment. In the educational arena, it has been found that the manner in which teachers respond to students has great influence on the students’ behaviors. The same can be said of facilitators—their responsive behaviors exert influence on participant self-esteem, attitude, achievement, desire to learn, and rapport.

Responsive behaviors are those actions undertaken by the facilitator after a participant responds to a facilitator’s question or instruction. Four distinctive responsive behaviors are listed below, all of which require instructors to listen to participants:

**Silence.** Facilitators are often afraid of silence during training sessions. It has been demonstrated, however, that the length of a pause following a question has impact on the length and thoughtfulness of the learner’s response. Short pauses following questions often result in brief or one-word participant responses. However, the willingness of facilitators to

allow longer pauses after questions facilitates whole sentences and complete thoughts and encourages speculation. Longer pauses place the responsibility for thinking on participants instead of on the facilitator.

**Accepting.** Nonjudgmental and nonevaluative accepting behavior on the part of the facilitator contributes to establishment of a safe, nonthreatening learning environment. It is important to recognize the messages you send verbally and nonverbally to participants. A simple “good” response to one participant followed by “okay” to another sends “value” messages. Your body language also sends powerful messages. A few value messages (both praise and criticism) can limit the learning potential of the group.

Here are some examples of useful acceptance behavior:

- C *Passive acceptance.* Receiving without value judgment. “Um-hum.” “Okay.” Writing the answer on a tear-sheet. “I understand.”
- C *Active acceptance.* Demonstrates an understanding. Paraphrasing, rephrasing, reflecting, and summarizing are examples of active acceptance.
- C *Empathic acceptance.* Acceptance of feelings in addition to ideas. Facilitators can demonstrate empathy when they express similar feelings from their own experience.

**Clarifying.** Clarifying is inviting the participant to become more specific or requesting the participant to elaborate or rephrase the idea. The intent is to help the facilitator better understand the participant’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Clarifying informs participants that their ideas are worthy of exploration and consideration; you honor the participant while attempting to gain an understanding.

**Facilitating data.** The facilitator makes it possible for participants to process and acquire information. If the facilitator perceives a need for data or participants request data, the facilitator must meet that need in some way, even if it means getting back to the participants at a later time. Facilitating data can take place in a variety of ways, by providing: (1) direct feedback; (2) equipment and materials; (3) primary and secondary sources of information; and (4) surveying the group for information.

## GENERAL SKILLS

In any training situation, a facilitator uses a set of general skills to provide a learning environment conducive to the accomplishment of training goals. Although the tasks of setting the learning climate, motivation, maintaining commitment, and closure are often not discussed as facilitation skills, they may in fact be the most useful for success. It is important to recognize that while a great deal of energy and time goes into session preparation and training delivery, as much energy must go into the support of the session and its participants.

The general skills of setting the learning environment, motivation, maintaining commitment, and closure pave the way for realization of several training goals: participant comfort, building positive training expectations, enthusiasm, respectful relationships, and expectations of success following training.

***Setting the learning environment.*** The first steps in preparing the learning environment occur well before the training session. Knowing the training goal and participants, designing the lesson, and developing learning materials contribute to the setting of the learning environment; specifically, these homework elements set the learning parameters.

With parameters established, how do facilitators create “successful” learning environments? The following exercise provides an opportunity to explore the elements of such a learning environment.

**C *Hotel Exercise.*** Think about the experience of arriving at a hotel in another city. Beginning with your arrival at the hotel and eventually entering your hotel room, what “environmental” factors did you notice/consider?

To list a few:

- Location of hotel (quality of area, access to resources).
- Behavior of staff (attentiveness, friendliness, helpfulness).
- Hotel room (cleanliness, decor, comfort, smells, sounds, feeling impression, room temperature, “goodies,” restroom).

All of these factors contribute to your qualitative expectation of your overall hotel stay. It can be suggested that the attention one pays to the arrival of a hotel room is very similar to a participant’s arrival at a training situation and expectation of training to follow!

Some very basic behaviors can help facilitators create a healthy learning environment. As a whole these actions can establish an atmosphere of good will, trust, creativity, and cooperation, which in the long run will help you meet training goals and survive training disasters.

**C *Preparing the room.*** Prepare the training environment to create positive impressions of the training to follow. Room set-up (visuals, physical layout, training materials, refreshments, music) can go a long way in setting the stage.

**C *Greeting the participants.*** Arrive early; leave late. Make yourself available to participants. If possible, greet participants as they arrive—this also helps with remembering names and relationships later.

**C *Making introductions.*** In some manner, depending on group size, make introductions. Introduce yourself; establish credibility while demonstrating warmth and humanness. Through participant introductions recognize each individual and the knowledge/experience he or she brings to the training.

**C *Setting ground rules/schedules.*** Participants expect you to take care of them during your time as their facilitator. Although they may not admit it, most participants appreciate

structure and rules, particularly to insure that you meet your commitments to them. Your discussion of rules and schedules can encourage harmonious working relationships, build enthusiasm, and build commitment. These ground rules and schedules are a contract between you and the participants; don't establish any rules/procedures you aren't willing to follow yourself. Time frames are important—start on time, end on time (and always seek permission from participants when agreed-upon time schedules are not met).

Traditional ground rules might include:

- C No idea is a bad idea.
- C It is important for everyone to participate, and it is helpful if individuals don't *over-participate* at the expense of others.
- C No arguments!
- C If instructions for activities are not clear, participants will ask for clarification.
- C Breaks (a few long breaks or a lot of short breaks), and participants can inform faculty when they are desperate for one.
- C If the agreed-upon schedule needs to be adapted, participants will be asked for their input.

**Addressing mental health issues.** Often, topics addressed in victim- or justice-related training sessions can produce vicarious trauma, particularly if any participants have victimization experiences. A good facilitator should announce at the beginning of the training that if any participants experience stress as a result of the topics to be addressed, they can leave the room without question, and they can seek support from faculty who are designated to provide assistance.

**Motivation.** Many participants do not attend training voluntarily; it is the role of the facilitator to encourage a “want to” attitude. Even if the knowledge or skill to be acquired is a requirement of the job, every facilitator should strive for “want to” versus “have to” attitudes. Encouraging participants to *want* to involve themselves in learning can take place at several points in the training process. Prior to training, participants can be encouraged to involve themselves through “pretraining” information that outlines the agenda highlights and anticipated benefits and outcomes of the training. During the introduction, the facilitator can again reinforce these items while demonstrating enthusiasm and sharing a few “success” stories. In lesson design, the facilitator's choice of teaching strategies can make training a vital, exciting process. Specific techniques can assist the facilitator in motivating participants:

- C Focus on results: sample goals, significance of goal attainment, examples of goal attainment.
- C Enhance the importance in learning: support from experts, support of management.
- C Focus on assurance of success: expectation of success, peer assurance of success.

- C Highlight the process of training: building expectations about process (the exciting things to come).
- C Encourage group support.
- C Nurture individual participants.

*Probably your most powerful motivator is your reputation as a quality facilitator!*

**Commitment.** Often the initial burst of enthusiasm at the beginning of a training session begins to fade as the session progresses. A variety of techniques can be used to rekindle enthusiasm:

- C Place energetic “commitment” activities in the lesson design.
- C Summarize progress during the session (enthusiasm and motivation).
- C Refocus participants on course goals and the value of the goals.
- C Conduct exercises that get participants up and moving around.
- C Conduct group activities that “mix and match” participants so they are exposed to a variety of input from their colleagues.
- C Encourage and validate continued participant involvement.
- C Demonstrate concern for the group and each individual.
- C Restore energy and good feelings.

**Closure.** Closing the session probably garners the least attention of any component of the training process. Closing activities are routinely minimized or eliminated in the interest of time. Brief, well-structured closing activities can have a powerful impact on participants as they complete the session and also when they return to the “real world.” Closing activities should:

- C *Provide closure to session.* Closing activities signal the end of the training session.
- C *Tie up loose ends.* Often sessions come to an end with unresolved issues, “put off” tasks, etc., which call for resolution. Closing activities allow the facilitator to address and make recommendations in these areas.
- C *Summarize the highlights.* The closing provides an opportunity for the facilitator to pull it all together. The facilitator succinctly integrates all that has occurred during the session and relates the experience to participants’ everyday life and/or occupation.
- C *Suggest appropriate follow-up.* The facilitator may suggest where participants can go to get additional information/instruction, and attend follow-up activities that reinforce and assess the learning of the completed training session.

- C *Provide for transition.* What is the link back to everyday life? What are participants going to do with the learning acquired during the training session? Closing activities can be structured to invite participants to explore their goals and consider their practical application to their jobs and personal lives.

## COORDINATION SKILLS

Coordination skills are those used by facilitators during the training session to provide information, and guide the learning process. While coordination may not be as challenging as presentation or facilitation, it is probably the most demanding and time intensive, and may be viewed as the major role of facilitator/trainer.

The coordination role of facilitators requires:

- C Constant “checking in” with participants to ensure that training objectives are being met.
- C Physically moving around the room to listen to and guide specific learning activities.
- C Getting feedback from individual participants during breaks as to the effectiveness of the training activities and processes.
- C Providing guidance to other faculty members based upon feedback from participants.

***Presenting the agenda and resource materials.*** The agenda is the written contract between the facilitator and participants. It outlines content and time frame commitments. Presenting the agenda often represents the first sustained opportunity to interact with participants. It sets the stage, sets the tone, and gives a glimpse of things to come. While presenting the agenda, facilitators should do the following:

- C Focus and maintain attention.
- C Set the tone, encourage participation.
- C Emphasize key points.
- C Create clarity.
- C Provide the opportunity to ask “Is there anything here that’s missing that you think I should address?”.

A brief review of resource materials is helpful, particularly in training programs where time does not permit in-depth coverage of the training topics. A “bonding with your binder” overview lets participants know that myriad resources are available to them for reference both during the training session and after. Facilitators should also be diligent about orally referencing the relevant resource materials for each segment of the training program.

Facilitators should also seek validation from participants that the agenda and resource materials meet their needs.

**Introducing activities.** An effective introduction of a learning activity prepares participants emotionally and cognitively by focusing them on the ideas, skills, and attitudes central to that activity. Goals and purposes of the activity must be clearly linked to the overall training goal. The following steps are important to successful activity introduction:

- C State the purpose and goals.
- C Suggest the value.
- C Clarify participant responsibilities.
- C Build positive expectations.

**Giving instructions/directions.** Instructions/directions should be structured in a way that encourages participants to focus their time and energy on carrying out the training activity rather than trying to understand the instructions. Written instructions can be a valuable tool. The following steps are important in giving instructions:

- C Select the mode (verbal, written, handout, overhead transparency).
- C Connect with prior learning if relevant.
- C Set specific constraints/time frames.
- C Confirm understanding, and/or provide opportunities for further clarification.

**Establishing activity groups.** The process of establishing activity groups involves arranging participants in groups appropriate in size and composition for efficient completion of learning activities. Activity groups promote the acquisition of interpersonal and cooperative skills and can enrich the learning environment by giving participants access to the knowledge and skills of other participants. The following should be taken into consideration when establishing groups:

- C *Size of groups.* The number of trainers to assist, the total number of participants, and the type of activity determine the size of activity groups. In general, larger groups are recommended for activities that stress group interaction and exchange. If focus is on individual contribution, smaller groups are usually indicated. Often, groups of six to ten individuals are good for brainstorming, discussion, and decision making. Problem solving is often more successful in smaller groups of two to five participants.
- C *Composition of groups.* Most often, diversity is the key to the group product. Group divisions can also be used by facilitators to break up “cliques,” deal with problem participants, and insure a distribution of knowledge and skills throughout the group.

**Techniques for dividing groups.** A number of techniques can be utilized to divide groups:

- C Placing stickers (i.e., dots, stars, etc.) on participants’ name tags that differentiate groups.



- C Divide the participants into two groups: those with *less* than five years experience, and those with *more* than five years experience. Then take three from each side to form teams of six (this also helps address “the learning curve” and provides opportunities for more experienced participants to share their insights with less experienced colleagues).
- C Divide the participants by profession (i.e., law enforcement, victim services, corrections), then either keep them in “like” groups or mix-and-match participants, depending on the learning activity.
- C Provide a candy—such as Tootsie Pops—to participants, and divide them by the color of the candy.
- C A fun group division approach is to give each participant a piece of paper with a “physical activity” listed on it, such as:
  - Winking.
  - “High-fiving.”
  - Snapping fingers.
  - Flapping their arms like a chicken.
  - Clapping their hands.
  - Twirling in circles.

Then, play a lively song (such as “Hit the Road, Jack!”) and ask participants to do their physical activity, and group together with other participants who are doing the same. This is an energizing approach to group division, and especially appropriate after lunch or late in the training day.

***Arranging for participant reports.*** Participant reports are often the group product or outcome of a group facilitation. If any segment of a session is going to “destroy” time frames, it is most often “group reports run amok!” Valuable group contributions can rapidly deteriorate unless carefully structured and guided by the facilitator. Facilitators must specifically delineate the structure and length of the report and determine the reporter. Reports must represent a brief summary of the group’s work (not individual work). Time frames must be relatively rigid and efforts should be made not to duplicate information reported by other groups.

If the facilitator wants to engage as many participants as possible, it is helpful to ask groups to designate a “recorder” (who records the group’s data on tear sheets) and a “reporter” (who delivers the data to the full group). Both positions can be voluntary, or designated by the facilitator (for example, the “recorder” is the participant with the birthday closest to today, and the “reporter” is the participant with the birthday farthest away from today—or the participants who traveled the least and furthest to the training venue). In all cases, recording and reporting should be voluntary, so those who fit the “requirements” should always be allowed to solicit another volunteer.

It is essential to process group reports in “round robin” fashion, i.e., one group reports one or two findings and then selects another group to process their findings, until all groups have had a chance to speak.

**Monitoring group activities.** Circulating the training room, unobtrusively, during group activities serves several functions: It allows facilitators to observe and confirm group activities, to correct and guide, to provide materials/information if necessary and, most importantly, to maintain contact with participants.

## PRESENTATION SKILLS

Presentation skills are those used by facilitators during the training session to provide the concepts, principles, models, and skills (the content of training) that participants are expected to learn. Presenting is the traditional role of teachers, instructors, and trainers. It is the presenter role that conjures up stereotypic images of teachers and professors standing behind a podium in front of the class lecturing to students. In training that is participant-centered, the presenting role is limited in use and utilized in conjunction with coordinating and facilitating to assist and guide participants as they learn. Several skills are critical to effective presenting, including:

**Communication.** Communication is a *two-way process* by which trainers make participants aware of the content of training. A two-way process requires trainers to arrange presentations so that there are opportunities for participants to speak, and for trainers to listen. Communication provides for a sharing of ideas and interpretations and to reach agreements about meanings.

**Structuring.** Structuring the presentation involves arranging the parts of the presentation so that participants can readily assimilate the content. Structuring also means adjusting the structure during a presentation to meet the needs of learners.

Most trainers arrange their presentations in three main parts: introduction, instruction, and conclusion.

- C **Introduction.** Suggests a context for the information to be presented and relates to other knowledge of participants and to earlier portions of the training session.
- C **Instruction.** The central portion of the presentation. Key points are determined and sequenced, and supporting details are identified. The number of key points should be kept at a minimum. Clear transitions should be made between key topics or ideas.
- C **Conclusion.** The conclusion should help participants retain what they have learned and complete internal processing of the information. The conclusion should include two elements: the review and the summary. The review offers a condensed version of the presentation; it focuses on information, skills, and procedures (content review). The summary focuses on the results of the presentation and participant participation (process summary).

**Body language.** Body language is any outwardly visible expression by facilitators that can positively affect participant efforts to learn. Body language includes facial expressions, eye

contact, gestures, postures, and physical positioning in the training environment. Participants are aware of your movements and will attribute meaning (positive and negative) to these movements. Body language can help your presentation in several ways: It can support your vocal presentation; certain movements (nods, smiles, hand gestures) help to create rapport with participants; and body movements can also contribute to maintaining participants' attention.

***Providing feedback.*** Providing feedback is the process facilitators use to give special information to participants that enables them to verify and, as necessary, modify their understanding of ideas and adjust responses or performances in learning activities. Using this process requires facilitators to be alert to participant behaviors that indicate a need for feedback, and to be creative in devising means of giving feedback that is appropriate to participants and to the learning environment.

Some special preparation prior to your presentation will help you provide feedback to participants. First, remind yourself of the learning objectives. Second, review the major points in your presentation and determine where participants may need feedback. Finally, review participant characteristics for clues to the type of feedback that would be most useful for them.

## **FACILITATION SKILLS**

Facilitation skills are those used during the training session to help participants explore, develop, and assess ideas and feelings in the context of learning activities. Using these skills, facilitators guide and promote learning. In this role, facilitators actively participate in learning activities, as well as the process of clarifying purposes, drawing out ideas, encouraging full involvement, and asking key questions. Facilitating is probably the trainer's most important and challenging role.

One of the most important facilitation skills is the ability to *delegate*. Facilitation requires 100 percent of one's energy and focus and, as such, can be exhausting. Facilitators can seek support and assistance for all learning activities from other facilitators, faculty, and even participants, as needed.

***Establishing/maintaining cohesiveness and cooperation.*** The establishment and maintenance of cohesiveness and cooperation are processes trainers use to ensure that learning activities requiring participants to work in groups will be carried out effectively. This process requires trainers to make clear to participants the significance of close cooperation for learning in a group context. It also requires trainers to minimize conflict, divisiveness, and competition, and maximize concern, support, and carrying out cohesiveness and cooperation tasks successfully. This requires you to use a variety of skills, including the following:

- C Clarifying goals and constraints.
- C Creating a harmonious atmosphere.
- C Securing an agreement on the basis for group work.

- C Providing clear and concise instructions.
- C Structuring group discussions.
- C Using body language.
- C Controlling participant/facilitator reaction to reactions.
- C “Checking in” periodically with other faculty and participants to ensure continued cohesiveness.

***Soliciting participant knowledge/expertise.*** The solicitation of participants’ knowledge and expertise is a process by which facilitators encourage participants working together in groups to share their knowledge and their skills. Through this process, the facilitator publicly acknowledges the expertise of each participant and seeks to induce every participant to contribute relevant portions of that expertise to group discussions.

To make the solicitation process effective, you will need to use all your interpersonal relations skills, as well as your communication skills, to help create an atmosphere in which participants will feel free to speak out at appropriate times. In addition, you will need to acknowledge and encourage the following:

- C Participant expertise.
- C Use of eliciting questions.
- C Participants asking eliciting questions of others.

***Encouraging participation.*** Encouraging participation is the process used by facilitators to help ensure that every participant has an opportunity to engage profitably in group learning activities. Encouraging members of groups to participate freely and equitably is particularly important to the success of learning activities. You should try to make full use of the information you have about participants and use a variety of the following skills and devices to encourage participation:

- C Use application questions—ones that focus on soliciting information about the utility of application of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.
- C Handle serial monologues/dialogues.
- C Deal with real or imagined deficiencies in knowledge and understanding.
- C Deal with frustration arising from faulty reasoning.
- C Deal with negative feelings.

***Remaining unaligned during activities.*** Establishing and maintaining a free and unaligned relationship to your participants are not always easy tasks. To resist pressures to align and, at the same time, to maintain the harmony and cohesiveness of your group, you will need to make

effective use of your communication and interpersonal skills. You will also need to use your skills in re-directing and returning questions. In addition, other tasks are important, including the following:

- C Establishing your role as facilitator.
- C Acknowledging participant responses.
- C Using “I” messages.
- C Using summaries to maintain nonalignment.
- C Actively seeking feedback from other faculty and participants.

### **THE ULTIMATE FACILITATOR IS A MASTER MAGICIAN!**

As you can see, behind the bells, whistles, smoke, and illusion is a facilitator using some very basic communication and interpersonal skills! As you gain experience in facilitating groups, you will learn to trust an inner sense of direction in determining the best action in a particular situation based on your understanding of peoples’ needs, both as individuals and as part of a larger group. You need to combine experience, feedback, observation, and reflection in order to develop competence. You will discover that experience is the most effective training tool!