THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF FACILITATION:
A FACILITATOR’S METHODOLOGY

(Adapted from the course, The Effective Facilitator)
WHAT’S INSIDE?

The Fundamental Secret 3
The Facilitation Cycle 4
Developing the Ten Principles 5-6
THE FUNDAMENTAL SECRET

A facilitated session is a highly-structured meeting in which the meeting leader (the facilitator) guides the participants through a series of pre-defined steps to arrive at a result that is created, understood and accepted by all participants.

In Michael Wilkinson’s authoritative book on facilitation, The Secrets of Facilitation, he shares more than 50 secrets to effective facilitating. Here we want to share one of the most essential secrets – in fact, the fundamental secret:

You can achieve more effective results when solutions are created, understood and accepted by the people impacted. If they create it, they understand it and they accept it.

In his book Transforming the Mature Information Technology Organization, Dr. Robert Zawacki from the University of Colorado put the secret this way:

$$ED = RD \times CD$$

That is, Effective Decisions = The Right Decision times Commitment to the Decision. Dr. Zawacki’s point is that the multiplication sign in the formula means that even the best decision can be rendered completely ineffective if commitment to the decision is lacking. A group of consultants might have created the 100% solution for the Sanitation Bureau, but if the workers did not buy in to the solution, the effectiveness of the solution would have been near zero.

Many know the secret. Yet, few truly understand how to apply it and how to unleash the power that comes with getting people together to develop solutions that will work for them.

For example, few understand:

- How to get people excited about participating in a solution process
- How to keep them focused and engaged
- How to ask questions that challenge without alienating
- How to guide a group without overpowering them
- How to address disagreements and build consensus
- How to deal with people who drop out, dominate or demonstrate other dysfunctional behaviors that can be disruptive
- How to ensure you gain commitment to action

That’s why we created The Ten Principles of Facilitation: A Facilitator’s Methodology. Following these ten principles allows professional facilitators to hit their mark every time and subject matter experts who lead sessions and meetings to easily follow a proven and repeatable methodology for leading groups to consensus.
Many consider facilitation to be an art, but there is definitely a science to the art. The Facilitator’s Methodology is at the foundation, and it is what the ten principles and LSI’s facilitation training courses are based on.

1. Preparing for Success
2. Getting the Session Started
3. Focusing for Group
4. The Power of the Pen
5. Information Gathering
6. Managing Dysfunction
7. Consensus Building
8. Keeping the Energy High
9. Closing the Session
10. Agenda Setting

Group Dynamics
DEVELOPING THE TEN PRINCIPLES

Supporting the ten principles are specific techniques that demonstrate how to execute the principles in practice. Some are covered here in this eBook, and the rest are taught in our training courses. Together, the principles and techniques comprise a comprehensive facilitation methodology that produces consistent, repeatable results.

1. Preparing for Success — Cover all the bases
You have been asked to lead a meeting with the executives of the organization to address three critical barriers to growth. It is essential to the organization’s future (and your career development) that this session be highly successful.

2. Getting the Session Started — Inform, excite, empower, involve
During our interviews with the veteran facilitators, we learned that the opening of any facilitated session is so critical; we dedicated an entire principle to the first fifteen minutes. During this time you set the stage for everything that follows. Start poorly, and you are fighting an uphill battle.

3. Focusing the Group — Establish the course; avoid detours
Principles 3, 4 and 5 make up what we call the Facilitation Cycle. For every agenda item in a facilitated session, you must focus the group (Principle 3), use the power of the pen (Principle 4) and perform information gathering (Principle 5). When you are done with the first agenda item, you go back to focusing the group (Principle 3) and go through the cycle for the second agenda item, and so on, until all agenda items are covered.

4. The Power of the Pen — Use it, don’t abuse it, make it theirs
Most facilitators aren’t aware that they can drive a group dysfunctional simply by abusing the pen. Often facilitators unintentionally devalue a participant’s comments by NOT recording a remark with which they disagree or waiting until the remark is validated by other people. Other times, they reword the participant’s comment, then record the reworded version (tacitly implying that the original words were not good enough!) In time, the group can lose complete ownership over the recorded comments simply because the comments aren’t theirs, but instead the facilitator’s.

Facilitation works. You will achieve more effective results when solutions are created, understood and accepted by the people impacted. You will be more successful, have more effective meetings, and gain better results in management situations. There is still much for us all to learn about the science of facilitation. Hopefully, this book will help you learn the secrets that Smart Facilitators already know for achieving consistent, repeatable results through facilitation.
Developing the Ten Principles (continued)

5. Information Gathering — Know your tools and how to use them
Facilitators must have a wealth of tools at their disposal in order to address a variety of needs. The most important tool for a facilitator is questioning. Rather than knowing just open- and closed-ended questioning techniques, a Smart Facilitator has nine different questioning tools.

6. Managing Dysfunction — Conscious Prevention, Early Detection, Clean Resolution
How do you deal with someone who is constantly saying, “No, that won’t work... The one you’re talking about now, we tried before, and it’s a bad idea... No, not practical, not realistic, won’t work here?” What about the people who want to dominate the discussion? Or — just the opposite — the people who sit there and say nothing, until they go out the door and then say how much a waste of time the meeting was?

7. Consensus Building — Create and maintain a consensus-focused process
Smart Facilitators know that people disagree for only three reasons. As facilitators, it is our job to create an environment in which consensus is the goal, and identifying and resolving sources of disagreement is seen as a vehicle for achieving the goal. When disagreements occur, we must recognize why people are disagreeing and be able to apply the appropriate consensus building strategy based on the source of the disagreement.

8. Keeping the Energy High — Set the pace, anticipate the lulls, react accordingly
Whether you are leading a single two-hour meeting or a series of half-day meetings, high energy is essential to keeping the group’s interest and engagement.

9. Closing The Session — Review, evaluate, end, debrief
Often meetings end without a clear understanding of what was accomplished, what decisions were made, etc. Smart Facilitators know that in closing a session it is important that everyone is clear on what was done, the benefits of what was done, the actions to take place once the meeting is over, and the method for ensuring that the actions are accomplished.

10. Agenda Setting — Adapt your agenda to address the need
The tenth principle ends at the beginning with constructing agendas that incorporate the other nine principles.
Are you ready to master the ten principles of facilitation?

Apply this methodology to help you lead a group to consensus every time and bring the facilitative leader out of you. Practice with more facilitation training to take your skills to the next level. Contact us for support from an experienced facilitator.

Engage Groups / Mobilize Change / Drive Outcomes

Strengthen your ability to achieve results by building your facilitation skills or by teaming with one of our 500+ professional facilitators at Leadership Strategies, Inc.

Contact us: www.leadstrat.com/contact-us or 800.824.2850.