

### Introducing Roles, Groundrules

- "I want you all to be clear about my role as facilitator..."
- "My job is to direct traffic, keep us focused on the agenda, ensure equal participation, make process suggestions."
- "I won't be contributing any of my own ideas to the discussion, but will only be assisting the process of the meeting."
- "Groundrules are the rules of conduct or procedures we decide to follow during a problem-solving session. The most basic are that we treat everyone equally and fairly. A procedural groundrule might be 'all decisions will be made by consensus.'"
- "Does anyone have any questions or concerns about the groundrules?"
- "Can the group agree to accept these rules during this session?"
- "Please let me know if you think I'm getting into the content of your issues with my own ideas. If you see this, tell me right away."

### Asking for Input/Drawing Out

- "Are you saying you're worried about...?"
- "Thanks for bringing that up. It's an important point to consider."
- "Derek, you haven't said anything. I'd like to know what you think."
- "Take your time...we'll wait for you; let Chris finish."
- "Let's hear from you, Al."

### Paraphrasing

- "I think Pam's point is that... Have I understood you right?"
- "It sounds like the situation we're describing is..."
- "I think what I'm hearing is that the problem is..."
- "So one alternative solution might be..."
- "You seem to be saying that..."

- "We've spent 15 minutes on this. Do you want to give it more time?"

### Stopping Evaluation/Criticism

- "We agreed we weren't going to criticize each other's ideas at this stage. Do you have an idea you'd like to add to the list?"
- "It's OK to see the issue differently at any stage of the process. But at this stage we're just getting out on paper everyone's perceptions and ideas..."
- "OK, that's Pam's statement. Now let's brainstorm other ideas..."

### Dealing with Reticence, Undercurrents, Tension

- "Bob, it looks like you don't believe that we'll be able to reach consensus on this...you may be right. The process of reaching agreement can sometimes be frustrating. But we won't know if we can until we try... Are you willing to give it a chance?"
- "It seems like there's more on this issue. Is there something else that needs to be discussed?"
- "In the long run, it's going to be much better to deal with the real issue than to ignore it."
- "Is there a more general situation that this problem is a part of?"
- "I sense that we're not addressing all the issues. Is that right?"
- "In my experience, it is unusual to find total agreement on a subject as important as this. Is there more here than people are saying so far?"
- "We seem to be moving very quickly through this report. Is this pace comfortable, or should we be slowing down?"
- "Ron, I'm not sure your question was fully answered...is that right?"
- "The issue of (name issue) seems to be the stumbling block in this discussion. Is that right?"
- "This discussion seems to be getting bogged down. Would it make sense to divide it into smaller sub-topics and discuss each one individually?"
- "The issue of (name issue) seems to be outside the scope of our initial problem definition. Do you want to enlarge the definition - do you want to table the issue for now - assign one of you to look into it before our next meeting...or what?"

### **Handling Objections/Argumentativeness**

- "I think that's an important concern. What can we do about it?"
- "This discussion is hard, and I think we're doing pretty well at listening to each other. Let's state clearly that the objective is to (state objective), not to establish whether Ross has a better approach than John."
- "You look concerned...do you want to say something?"

### **Redirecting Content Questions Posed to Facilitator**

- "That's a good question. Who knows the answer?"
- "To do a good job of facilitating, I need to stay out of the content. I have my sense about (the topic), but for the duration of the meeting, I need to stay neutral."

### **Dealing with Side Conversations**

- "Let's try to keep a single focus here. We won't get anything done if we're going off in different directions."
- "Jim, did you have a comment you wanted us to get?"

### **Dealing with Gossip/Rumors**

- "Is that a fact? How can we find out the answer to that?"
- "Let's call and check that out now, before we proceed..."

### **Dealing with Dominance by One Participant**

- "We've already taken up some time on this. Let's make sure we hear from everybody."
- "I'd like to hear all the views on this."

### **Dealing with Resistance/Hostility Toward the Process or the Facilitator**

- "It doesn't seem to you like this process will accomplish (state objective). Is there another procedure you think might work better?" (Then check it out with the whole group.)
- "I can see a couple of alternatives here. We seem to be really spinning our wheels now. If the process is the problem - and that's what Alice is saying - one idea would be for me to step aside as facilitator for awhile, and have one of you suggest and facilitate some procedures for the group. Another idea might be to take a short break now while I talk with any of you who have suggestions as to how we might revise our process, and facilitate differently after the break. How do these options sound? Are there other ideas?"

- "It sounds like you're saying you'd prefer not to do this process."
- "Let's use a round robin just to get the ideas out - all the different perspectives."
- "Larry says we're not getting anywhere. Does anyone else have a comment on this?"
- "I'm not asking you to trust me, but instead to decide - as the meeting progresses - whether or not it is meeting your needs. Please watch the recording of your statements, and if it is not accurate, please speak up right away." (In the face of a strong attack or continued disruption - where progress is hampered by the tension created - be willing to recess or end the meeting.)

### **Managing Conflict or Personal Attacks Between Participants**

- "We seem to be stuck. Let's try something. Hal, will you try arguing Tom's position for a minute?"
- "The problem then, as you see it, is..."
- "If I understand you correctly, you think we should..."
- "Is there anything else about this particular issue that's bothering you?"
- "It sounds like your concerns with Maureen's suggestions are..."
- "Personal accusations are a violation of the groundrules." (Point this out to the entire group, not to the attacker.)
- "Strong feelings are natural in this kind of situation, but if we don't control them with our groundrules, they can be very destructive." (Say this to the entire group.)

[If accusations are exchanged (for example, "I would like to know why you went back on your word"), say "I don't think we should pursue this. Remember, we all agreed that we wouldn't attack each other, and this comment sounds pretty close to an attack." Or, "Wait a minute...if we're going to pursue this, I want to remind you of the groundrules. We're describing what was done and what was said, not making judgments..."]

### **Dealing with Frustration/Chaos/Process Breakdown**

- "Remember, this is your meeting. If you don't like what's happening, let's make some suggestions and we'll change it."
- "I'm not sure how to handle this. Does anyone have any suggestions for how we can get unstuck?"

- "I think the point that Sally just raised is important to keep in mind."
- "Who would like to propose?"
- "Is there anyone who could not live with this proposal?"
- "Can you think of any changes that would satisfy your concern?"
- "Can you see a way this can be dealt with?"
- "Can everyone live with this, as revised? Is there anyone who can't accept this as it now stands?"
- "Are there any on the list that you know now that you can't accept - at least as they are now written?"
- "Does everyone agree we can cross #7 off the list?"
- "I'm going to be pushing you to reach agreement. But please let me know if you think I'm pushing too hard. It's important not to let go of your concerns until you're satisfied they've been heard and taken into account."
- "Do we have agreement that...?"
- "It looks like we have agreement now... Are there any concerns?"
- "Does everyone agree that...?"
- "My sense is that we have agreement that..."
- "Are there any objections to the proposal that...?"
- "Chris says she wouldn't be able to live with the proposal because... Can anyone think of a way of dealing with that?... OK, what do you think, Chris? Would that make a difference? Could you now live with it? Can everyone else live with the change?"

## Suggested Resources

- Great Meetings! How to Facilitate like a Pro by Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb - Hanson Park Press
- The Skilled Facilitator by Roger Schwarz - Jossey-Bass
- The Art of Facilitation by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor - Fisher Books
- The Zen of Groups by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor - Fisher Books
- Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making by Sam Kaner - New Society Publishers

