


5 Tips for Facilitating Great Small Groups

Being a good process facilitator requires mastering simple but essential techniques. While leaders may be tempted to immediately start teaching or explaining, this approach is not always effective.

If the group only focuses on theory, it will not foster much bonding or healing. Some of the best lessons in life come through experience rather than by reading books.

For example, you can attend a lecture on trees, but it is more meaningful to go out and experience them. As a group leader, your role is to help members learn through both approaches.



1. Notice and
Share What You
Observe

Notice what is going on in the group, and from time-to-time share what you see. This can be very simple but also very powerful. Here are examples of how these observations may work in your group:

- “I notice that it seems a little sluggish in here tonight. Why do you think that is?”
- “It seems like we were really connecting, and things changed. Why is that?”
- You might aim a well-timed, helpful process statement to an individual. “Joe, I notice that when you talked about that, you seemed to really be feeling some things. Can you tell us what they are?”

Notice when the group is stuck and address the situation.

“It feels dead in here for the past few weeks. Does anyone else notice that?”

If you do not address it, people might drop out. If you address it, the group may reinvent itself.



2. Be the Guardian of the Process

Do something about people who interrupt, dominate, or keep process from occurring. Different levels of intervention may be appropriate, depending on the particulars, but do something!

You cannot allow a person to kill the group process. If the group is not oriented toward going deep on feedback, just interrupt the interrupter or over-spiritualizer.

Say, “Hold on, Joe. I want to hear more from Susie.” The group will feel protected by you. Joe will get the message, and the process will be saved.



3. Hold Members to Their Covenant

In a deeper group setting, where members have covenanted to receive feedback, the process goes a step farther. After the initial exchange, suggested above, say to Joe,

“Joe, I notice that when people talk about feelings, you often interrupt and give a Bible verse. Are you aware you do that?”

Then, if the group operates on an even deeper level, you might say, “What do some of you experience when Joe does that?”

Remember, what is a suitable intervention level depends on what the group has agreed to do with each other and depends on the facilitator's skill level.

It's up to you as facilitator to make sure these structures remain intact. Otherwise, deep process statements can turn chaotic.

No matter what intervention level you need in order to guard the process, guard it. Even if it just means interrupting the interrupter and saying, "Hold on. Susie was talking."



4. Ask Open-ended Questions

Process facilitation does not have to be deep or threatening. To process is to experience and to do things that further the experience. Asking open-ended questions often furthers the process:

“What are some of your responses to the passage we just read?”

“Can you tell us more?”

“Does anyone have anything they would like to share or to add?”

“What does this bring up for you?”

“Where do you have difficulty applying what we just heard or talked about?”

Avoid questions that do not further discovery or process, such as questions with yes or no or factual answers. Process is not a geometry class where there is a right answer. It is a walk in the park. “What stands out for you?” and “What do you see?” are questions that don’t have a right or wrong answer.



5. Ask for Group Feedback

Ask the members from time to time how they think the process is going.

“What is getting us there? What is keeping us from there?”

Even more powerful at times is to see whether they can notice and describe the process.

“How would some of you describe how we have been doing, how the process is working? What has that been like? How would you want it to be different?”

Certainly, teaching and information are important to your group purpose and to life. But it's just as important to experience that truth, particularly in relational contexts like a group.

Your job as a facilitator is not to “be the experience,” but to facilitate it.

You are the shepherd of the experience.

Then the group will take on a life of its own, growing in richer ways than it ever could simply through lectures.