



CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Conference leadership skills and how well you facilitate training sessions is half the battle. We would like to review 16 techniques for effective group facilitation in this article, and show you how to apply them in your training sessions. Please keep in mind that our premise is that conference leadership or *facilitation*, provides a process for learning to occur through participant discoveries. It is usually not teaching.

One of the best places to start with an article like this is to think back at the “worst” seminar that you ever attended, and ask yourself the following questions:

- What happened?
- What were the consequences to the participants, the Company, and the instructor?
- What could have been done differently?
- What insights were gained from reviewing this situation?

The following is a list of the sixteen conference leadership skills and some questions and blanks that you should fill in when using these skills.

Link training to organizational issues

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of its use?

Provide personal examples of the skill being used successfully

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of its use?

Verbally reinforce participants who respond

Use simple phrases like thank you, or good comment. Connect participant's comments.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What are other examples of its use?

Non-verbally reinforce participants who respond

Simple nods, smiles, and walking toward the responder.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What are other examples of its use?

Ask open-ended questions

Questions that cannot be answered by a simple *yes* or *no*, such as *What experiences have you had with this skill.*

Why and when would you use this skill?

Write two closed-ended questions and their corresponding open-ended versions.

Show consistent interest in participants

Face participants as much as possible, maintain eye contact, and move toward people when they are speaking.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What are additional examples of its use?

Call on participants by name

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is a cue that would suggest its use?

Ask polling questions

Questions such as *How many of you...? Who has ...?*

Why and when would you use this skill?

What are other examples of its use?

Wait for a response after asking a question

If a question is met with silence, allow 10 seconds before continuing

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is a cue that would suggest its use?

Use networking among participants

Have participants work in groups of 2-4 people.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What are other examples of its use?

Defer to the group

When an appropriate question is asked, say *What do the rest of you think?*

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is a cue that would suggest its use?

Ask for a summary

At the conclusion of a section of training, ask someone to briefly summarize the material.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of its use?

Give clear instructions

Use simple sentences and pace your instructions to the needs of the group.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of its use?

Check for understanding

Periodically ask people what questions they have.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of its use?

Watch for non-verbal cues

Nodding off, looking around, or side conversations are examples.

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of things you could do?

Make smooth transitions between training sections

Why and when would you use this skill?

What is an example of its use?

Try practicing and using these skills in your upcoming training sessions, and we are sure that you and your participants will find them most rewarding.

Now we would like to cover some other important conference leadership challenges that surface from time to time in all training sessions, disruptive behaviors. We will focus on two types of disruptive behavior: over participation and aggressive behavior, and how to handle each.

Over-participation

- Ask for the link between the responder's comments and the training topic.
- Ask other participants for their opinion.
- Summarize the comments and move on.
- Ask closed-ended questions (can only be answered with yes or no).
- Refer to the ground rules, if you have established any.

Aggressive behavior

- Maintain a relaxed posture.
- Don't defend the training.

- Clarify or paraphrase and acknowledge the comments.
- Use a *problem-solving* approach.
- Let the group help you with the problem by deferring to them.
- Allow the other person to save face.
- (If necessary) privately state the behavior change needed.