

COACHING GUIDE: RESOURCE 8

Helping People Contribute: Facilitation Moves to Improve Communication

When used effectively...

...facilitation moves can help guide learning and help learners feel comfortable using their voice to contribute and fully participate. Facilitation is also essential to reinforcing an inclusive environment for public speakers, breaking patterns that might privilege some learners over others.

To help people feel comfortable....

People need to know you have their back and that you are genuinely interested in getting to know them and helping them.

Some techniques:

- **Validate:** Whenever anyone says anything, make sure you listen deeply and respond first by validating what they say.
- **Clarify:** It is hard to connect if you're confused. Ask questions to make sure you understand what they are saying. ("Tell me more about..." "Can you give me an example of..." "I'm curious, what do you mean by...")
- **Generate:** Offer ideas as questions, instead of as directives. This ensures the learner is still in charge of their own learning. ("What do you think if we...." "What do you think about the situation where we....")
- **Inspire:** Give examples from your own experiences to inspire their ideas. Offer examples that you have seen so they can riff off of something concrete. ("I went to this event once, and I saw..." "I've seen something like that before, and they...")
- **Suggest:** Sometimes you do need to provide answers or offer direct suggestions to save time, but try to do this after learners have tried out ideas of his/her own.

To facilitate equitably....

When people feel put on the spot or unsure of whether their contributions are going to be "right" or valued, they cannot participate to their fullest ability. A few ways to avoid exclusion:

- **Pose an open-ended, but concrete prompt.** Questions are hard to answer if they are too long, contain too many parts, or use unclear language. For instance, instead of "What do people think about this question and what should we be doing to address the issue?" try "What is your first reaction when you hear this question?" and after receiving a few answers, follow up with the second part, "What is one possible action step we should explore?" Questions are intimidating to answer if there is a "right" answer.
- **Take care with tone.** Your tone might reveal you have an answer in mind. These discussions become more about guessing your answer as opposed to genuine learning.

- **Encourage people to take time to formulate responses.** Too many discussions privilege the ability to answer the fastest. Incorporate time to create quality responses by weaving in time for turn-and-talk, silent writing, or advance preparation and research.
- **Distribute attention.** If there is an answer you are looking for, do not spend all of your time drilling one student until you get that response. Instead, start with one person and then have other people contribute to the original idea, until ideas build on each other.
- **Know when to wait and when to move on.** It takes practice to feel comfortable with awkward silences (but it's worth it!). That said, sometimes it is much more useful to stop and move on, or plan to revisit a question at a later time.
- **Prepare people privately.** If there are people you want to participate more, give them even more advance preparation, contributing to something specific at a specific date, (especially around areas of expertise or interest).
- **Teach sentence starters.** Help people build on each other's ideas by teaching sentence starters for how to add on, disagree, agree, or question. Help them rely less on you and maybe even practice having students facilitate discussions while you observe.
- **Be consistent.** To feel comfortable participating, students need to know what you expect. It helps to have rituals, clear expectations, and familiar activities so students feel more confident over time.
- **Keep an eye on the clock.** Facilitation is sometimes more about timekeeping than being the person in charge. Giving regular time checks and adjusting time to support students teaches them how to manage time, especially with speech preparation.
- **Balance time with different people.** It is good to check in with yourself about who you tend to spend your time with. While you may not get to talk to everyone in a single session, distribute your interactions over time to attend to all relationships.

