

The Role of the Group Facilitator

The role of facilitator is broader than the role of a teacher. A teacher is primarily concerned for communicating content. A facilitator of a group is concerned with content (subject matter) but also must be attentive to process (group dynamics). The facilitator of a group is a person who tends the group dynamics consciously and intentionally as an act of service, to enable the group to form, and then function in health, creative, inclusive and collaborative ways.

It is essential for facilitators to become attuned to separating content and process within the group. Content can be thought of in terms of **information** and **transformation**. A healthy group will be one where members are growing in knowledge and this knowledge is being lived out. It is important that we are not just 'hearers' but 'doers' of God's word. Application questions are vital and the facilitator's example is crucial if groups are to be dynamic and life-changing.

Process is how the group is responding at any given time. It involves the internal (largely unspoken) dynamics by which people work out and maintain their place and role in the life of the group.

Three key aspects within any group are: **inclusion, influence & intimacy**.

Inclusion – “*Do I belong here?*” Created through a sense of warmth and acceptance where people feel free to be themselves without pretence.

Influence – “*What do I have to contribute to this group?*” Occurs when there is a sense of being listened to and their insights valued and a sense of adding something to the group (wisdom, experience, knowledge, humour, service, leadership, care, prayer etc).

Intimacy – “*How deeply will I share?*” Established through a clear covenant/commitment to each other. This creates and fosters a sense of trust that the group is safe, supportive, mutual and confidential.

Some good questions to ask when thinking about the dynamics of your home group are:

- **Communication patterns** – who talks when, how and why? Who remains silent?
- **Authority, influence & leadership** – Who seems to be respected and to exercise some authority in the group? How did this come about? How is this authority expressed?
- **Roles** – What roles have emerged in the group? Who fills them? Who does not seem to have a role?
- **Care** – What level of care, support and sharing is evident in the group? Does this care extend beyond the group meeting? What friendships exist beyond the group? What impact do these friendships have on the group? Is anyone relationally isolated/disconnected in the group?
- **Conflict** – How does the group deal with differences, tension & uncertainty?
- **Depth** – How open and vulnerable are members with each other? What level of self disclosure do I model to the group?

Even though we may not always be consciously aware of it, we are dealing with these issues of process all the time. They can be resolved in many different ways in a group, some healthy, inclusive, open and creative; others contrived, controlled, manipulative and consequently unhealthy or even toxic for the group.

Key Roles

- Intentionally plans & designs the content & process of the group meeting. Knows the destination and what is important along the way.
- Attends to the ways individuals connect, participate & share with the group
- Shapes the interaction of participants so that everyone is included, valued and involved.
- Keeps the group on track in terms of its purpose and focus and timing.
- Assists the group and models an appropriate tone of interaction & level of intimacy.

Skills

- Re-directing - intervening when the discussion has gone off track.
- Re-framing - reshaping of a misguided comment
- Drawing out - exploring comments and assisting to the group to discover implications
- Drawing in - looking to include and increase participation
- Recognising constructive & vulnerable contributions through encouragement and affirmation
- Care-fronting – sensitively challenging and speaking the truth in love

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