7 Traits of
Expert Facilitators

The greatest presenters may not necessarily be great facilitators — facilitation requires mastering the art of guidance. The ability to guide learners is very different from presenting them information. It requires engagement on a different level.

There are several traits that are common among expert facilitators. Below we outline some of those commonalities so you can begin sharpening your facilitation skills.

Trait One:

Ability to refocus a group with ease

Great facilitators can take a lively group and get them back on track, tactfully. The key isn't necessarily getting back on track quickly; it's about doing it in a way that is graceful and fluid. By establishing ground rules in the beginning and sticking to those rules you can transition and refocus your group in a way that is predictable. It's important to refocus in a way that is beneficial to the facilitation process, not disruptive.

Trait Two:

Problem behavior minimizer

Problem behavior can make or break a facilitation session. Whether it's under-participation, over-participation, session disruption or frequent cellphone usage, an unengaged learner can create an unengaged group. Great facilitators minimize problem behavior by creating an engaging atmosphere. Be sure to consistently check for engagement, and address problem behaviors as quickly as possible.

Trait Three:

Models active listening

As a facilitator, you're there to model as well as guide the learners. By using the SLANT technique – sit up, lean forward, ask questions, nod head and thank the learner— you can be sure you're modeling active listening techniques.

Trait Four:

Adapts to learner needs

It's important to go where the session needs to go. Facilitation is about starting with a problem, and guiding the group to an overall solution, so don't be inflexible with your schedule. Allow the group the opportunity to go where they need to with the session and come up with the solutions the way that's best for the group. To be an expert facilitator, the session must adapt and nurture the learning process.

Trait Five:

Patience

One challenge that many facilitators face is conquering the silence. Though a quiet room may feel uncomfortable, it's important to give your participants the time to process information. In order to create a participant-centered learning environment, it's important to allow adequate processing time for all learners.

THE BOB PIKE GROUP

Trait Five (cont.):

Give learners the opportunity for individual reflection, discussions in pairs and finally, group sharing. More ideas and solutions will begin to emerge from the group if you allow time for individual thought processing. If you start brainstorming as a large group, you may hinder the thought process of your learners and suppress individual ideas. It's important to be patient with your participants and give them the opportunity to brainstorm and reflect. Doing so encourages participation and creates a more engaged learning atmosphere.

Trait Six:

Big picture thinker

The ability to synthesize the overall takeaways of a session is important. Facilitators have to be able to summarize key points and wrap up a session for participants.

A tip if your summarization skills are not quite up to par: ask a note taker in the audience to summarize the session. Then, once you feel comfortable, you can begin taking over the summarization role in your sessions.

Trait Seven:

Minimizes personal talk time

When it comes to facilitation, it's all about the group. Your role as facilitator is to act as a guide and expert resource, not a presenter. Your group is the one with the knowledge, so allow them to do the talking. Ultimately, the group is the one with the solutions. So act as a coach and guide your group to the solution. Doing so will create a participant-centered facilitation atmosphere that will deliver the best results.

Expert facilitators guide learners to an overall solution. They do this by modeling these 7 traits and engaging the entire group. Your role as a coach brings out the knowledge of the group.