Learning to lead a meeting is more than just managing agendas. It means reading the group's mood and stepping in at the right moment to turn attention back to productive work, according to Jennifer Abrams, author of Having Hard Conversations (Corwin, 2009).

A good facilitator, Abrams said, sets the tone and can “change the whole day” for a teaching team meeting. She recalls a moment from her time as a district staff developer for new teachers. It was 4 p.m., she said, and the teachers were tired after their workday. She began to hand out packets of information. She got to one young woman who seemed as though she was in a particularly bad mood. As she handed the woman the packet, the woman shoved it back and said, “I totally know all this already.”

Abrams said she took a deep breath to compose herself, recognized that the woman might have other concerns bothering her, and said, “I’m not disputing that you have background knowledge and expertise. I’m also committed to not wasting your time. I’m OK with you leaving, but you’ll need to let your principal know if you’re doing that.”

Several critical elements averted making a difficult situation worse, according to Abrams: She paused and made sure to get oxygen to her brain; she used the power of positive presupposition to avoid making the confrontation personal and assumed that other challenges were behind the woman’s bad mood; she acknowledged the woman’s expertise; she promised the woman that her time would be valued; and she gave her the ability to choose, albeit with consequences.

Challenge yourself.

Learning to facilitate involves challenging oneself, Abrams said.

Continued on p. 4
“Someone once told me that if I wanted to stretch myself, I should try to facilitate groups,” she said. “And I agree that it can be scary, but as Paulo Coelho said, ‘If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine. It is lethal.’”

“As a teacher leader, I needed to step into the discomfort. Teacher leaders need to be open to the mystery of what happens when we get a group together and instead of being intimidated by the group, get curious about what the possibilities are. The facilitator role can be exciting.”

Being prepared emotionally can be half the battle, Abrams said. She recommended preparing to facilitate by taking care of yourself first:
- Get a good night’s sleep.
- Work out in the morning.
- Dress comfortably, but professionally.
- Listen to empowering music just before the meeting.

She said she often wears a charm on a necklace that she can grab in a moment of stress.

While some of the fundamentals of facilitating are covered in books such as Unlocking Group Potential, by Robert Garmston with Valerie von Frank (Corwin, 2012), Abrams said the biggest hurdle for most new facilitators is handling challenging situations and knowing when to intervene.

The first thing to keep at the forefront, she said, is to work to maintain the conversation at the highest possible level by keeping the topic tied to a framework, a standard, a research-based teaching practice, a job description, a school goal or something that maintains neutrality.

But when that fails? What do new facilitators need to know to prepare for times when the conversation gets hard? Abrams suggests that facilitators do the following:

Be self-aware.

Consider the language you choose to frame the issue or topic. Make sure it is professional, Abrams said. She said some language triggers immediate defensiveness, and the evidence shows up quickly in people’s faces — a grimace, a clenched jaw, a quickly shifted gaze.

For example, she said, others’ reaction is completely different to these two approaches:
- We need to look for ways to effectively manage technology in the classroom to enhance children’s learning.
- We’re not using our interactive whiteboards right.

One caveat, she added, is not to say anything at all unless you have clearly in mind what different behavior you would like to see instead.

“Do not pass ‘go’ unless you know what you would substitute,” she said. “It cannot be fuzzy in your mind. You have to know.”

Prepare mentally so you can be mindful of your facial expression and your gestures, she said, to keep your body language positive. Watch your eye contact — avoiding eye contact with someone can signal hesitation, but a too-intense stare is confrontational, she said.

She said the goal is to aim for a middle ground that is effective for the situation, trying to imagine how listeners might perceive your body language.

Tone of voice is another essential element of good facilitation, according to Abrams.

“Having a credible voice, in which one’s tone goes down at the end of the sentences, provides the person speaking with a sense of authority, and gives listeners the feeling that the speaker knows the subject,” she said. “When one is using an approachable voice, or ‘up speak,’ the listener is less likely to sense strength of conviction in the speaker and might be less likely to take the speaker seriously — but also will be less likely to perceive a threat.”

Know when to speak.

Silence can sometimes be OK, she said. Ask yourself a few questions before intervening with the group when you feel things aren’t on the right track. Sometimes the group may veer into excuses, for example, she said, or may want to talk about students instead of instruction. To decide whether to intervene, she said:
- Consider timing. Will your message be received? Is the group in the right frame of mind? Is there enough time for the conversation that might ensue? For people to process?
- Consider the stakes. How high are the stakes for intervening? How important is speaking up to making an improvement for students? What are the negative effects if you do speak out? Will you be able to change anything?
- Consider the next step. Is what you want to happen manageable, or might the group see it as overwhelming? What’s the worst that will happen if you don’t speak up? Is this your issue alone or a broader issue (i.e., is this only a difference of opinion)?

Make your statements short and clear, then allow time for your words to be processed, she said. Once you’ve spoken, she said, don’t continue talking just because you’re uncomfortable.

“Break the habit of seeing the truth as a problem,” she said.

Know when to have a private conversation.

Sometimes a matter might be best handled with an

Continued on p. 5
个体如果只是个人的情况，而不是整个团体的情况，Abrams说，她建议组织者可以安排一次单独的谈话，而不是花时间与整个团体讨论一个只影响一个人的话题。

在决定请求一次单独的谈话之前，她建议考虑以下几点：

- 这个问题在教育上或专业上是否不妥?
- 这个人的行为是否对学生的安全或其他工作人员构成物理上的危险?
- 这是一个可能对学生的感情或工作人员的感情造成伤害的行为或行为吗？

当组织在一个会议中设置一个个别谈话时，如一个被反复违反的规范，Abrams说，考虑发送的信号是很重要的。例如，老师可能在她的教室里更自在，但一个中立的空间可能让双方更舒适。

“重要的是要意识到家具和地点对人们舒适程度的影响，”她说。

找到你的声音

Abrams，出版了一本电子通讯叫做《Voice Lessons》，她说，成长为一个领导者的最重要方面是找到你的声音。她引用了Harriet Lerner的话，她在《The Dance of Connection》中写道：

“我们的对话发明了我们。通过我们的言语和沉默，我们变得更大或更小。通过我们的言语和沉默，我们削弱或增强他人，并且我们缩小或扩大我们之间的可能性。我们如何使用我们的声音决定了我们关系的质量，我们在世界中的身份，以及世界可能成为和可能成为。显然，问题很大。”（Lerner，2001，p. 239。）

“对于教师领导者来说，找到我们的声音的重要性在于能够带来我们所知道可以真正改变教室的改变。”

参考资料


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