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The 'Never Evers' *of workshop facilitation*

By Peggy A. Sharp

Much has been written about planning effective workshops and staff development sessions. Many of these articles provide specific ways to increase the effectiveness of the session. These articles have generally suggested "what works" in workshops.

Experience and research also indicate certain things that a facilitator should never do during a workshop. I have gleaned these "never evers" from observing other presenters, conducting my own workshops, consulting with experts, and reading the literature. As a thoughtful reminder place this list of "never evers" near your other workshop materials.

Never ever forget that individuals at the workshop are unique, with needs, interests, and experiences particular to them. Adults have a strong sense of self and bring all life experiences — past and present, personal and professional — to bear on new learning (Brookfield, 1986). Each adult in the session has a different reason for attending and will be pleased and inspired by and learn from different activities and workshop experiences (Merriam, 1989). Accommodate various learning styles by using a variety of instructional strategies such as small group discussions, lectures, simulations, reading, writing, and using media.

Never ever require individuals to participate in an activity. Many participants are eager to share and try new ideas in a workshop, but some are uncomfortable and feel foolish. When suggesting activities, make it clear that participation is op-

tional; those who prefer to watch will learn from the activity in their own way.

Never ever talk to participants as if they are children. Adults are not 2nd graders and should not be treated as such. Incorporate specific adult-oriented presentation, communication, and facilitation skills into the workshop and consider the particular needs of participants (Seaman & Fellenz, 1989).

Never ever ridicule participants or their experiences. Acknowledge the expertise and experience of the participants. It is inappropriate to put people in the position of feeling uncomfortable about what they do not know or something they have or have not done.

Never ever neglect the participants' personal needs. Participants have basic physical needs that need to be met if learning is to occur (Knowles, 1980). Give participants ample breaks and make it clear that you understand they may need to get up at

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Workshops

The ‘never evers’ of workshop facilitation

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times other than the break. Provide appropriate refreshments for breaks and tables and chairs appropriately sized for adults.

Never ever say that you are going to rush through and compress material in order to complete what is usually a longer workshop in a shorter length of time. Develop a plan for the workshop. Cut it thoughtfully so the workshop stands on its own. Participants deserve to attend a session developed just for them (Brookfield, 1986). Give participants all you can in the time provided without referring to what they’re missing.

Never ever say that you would have brought more materials if it had been possible. Participants need to know that you are ready for them and that they are getting all that they deserve. They are not interested in excuses about materials that were too heavy, took up too much space, or that you lacked time to produce the materials.

Never ever tell participants what you’ve forgotten. Participants have no idea what you intended to bring or intended to say, so they will have no idea of what you’ve forgotten. Appearing disorganized is a sure reason for participants to think something is wrong with the workshop (Pike, 1989). If they know you’ve forgotten something, they may feel cheated.

Never ever give excuses. Participants don’t like to know what could be better; they want to spend time at something that is the best it can be. If you’ve made a mistake and it’s a mistake that is obvious to everyone, don’t hesitate admitting that (Pike, 1989).

Never ever read from a lengthy prepared text. Reading excerpts from a paper or book is appropriate, but never read an extended paper or lengthy selection from a book. Reading from a paper can give the impression that the participants

are irrelevant (Brookfield, 1990). If the participants need to have the information verbatim, then provide a copy.

Never ever share illegible handouts. Use high-quality originals for photocopying. As adults age, it becomes more difficult for them to read small print, so it’s especially important to have clear copies with adequate sized print (Bee, 1987).

Never ever share a disorganized “mishmash” for a handout. Participants want to leave with materials that reflect the content of the workshop. Each handout should include the workshop title and identify the content of the session. Number pages to help people locate information during the workshop and after they leave the session. Provide information that allows for follow-up after the workshop.

Never ever give participants something to read and then read it to them. Most participants are capable of reading on their own and would prefer that the workshop include information and activities that supplement what they can read independently. Adults are active participants in their learning and can take responsibility for their own learning (Brookfield, 1986).

Never ever share overhead transparencies that participants cannot see or read. If people in the back row cannot see the words on an overhead transparency, they are too small or too low. If you can’t read the original for the transparency from eight feet away, then the words are too small. Letters on a transparency should be at least one quarter of an inch. Use the top third of a transparency for the most significant information and limit you transparencies to a single idea. The appropriate use of colors and symbols can enhance your transparencies (Satterthwaite, 1990). Ask someone in the back of the room to signal you if there is a transparency that is not plainly visible so that you can make appropriate adjustments.

Never ever share with participants a workshop schedule that is impossible to follow. Tell participants the general structure of the day. Identify broad subject areas and general time frames rather than specific topics for specific time periods. Be organized but allow yourself some flexibility and opportunity to respond to participants’ needs and unexpected events of the day (Pike, 1989).

Never ever go past the scheduled time. Participants want a full workshop, but they want it to end on time. Going beyond the scheduled time creates anxiety, and participants will spend more time worrying about when the facilitator will close than considering what is being shared (Pike, 1989). Stop at or a few moments before the scheduled ending time even if you were unable to share all that you wanted. Those who are truly interested can talk with you privately after the session.

Never ever forget that you have an audience. Workshop facilitation is collaborative in that the facilitator and participants work together during the workshop (Brookfield, 1986). Walk among and talk with the participants. Standing at the front for too long creates an artificial boundary between you and the participants and makes an atmosphere of collegial collaboration difficult to attain.

Never ever take the workshop so seriously that everyone (including the facilitator) cannot have fun. While the content of the workshop is important, don’t forget to “lighten up” and insert some humor and levity into the day (Pike, 1989). Use humor that fits naturally and logically into the workshop to make a point and help everyone feel at ease.

Never ever plan a workshop without considering this list of never evers. Use these suggestions to help make your next workshop one that participants would “never ever” want to miss.

Where's the restroom?

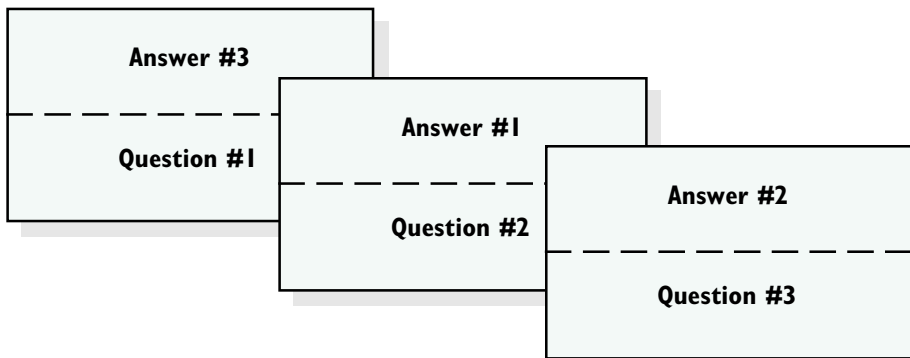
COMMENTS TO FACILITATORS: Participants deserve and need basic information about the logistics of your workshop. They also need an opportunity to meet and greet other participants. This activity addresses both of those needs.

TIME: 15 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Index cards.

Directions

1. Collect information that participants will need to know while they're attending the workshop: the day's schedules, when breaks will occur, location of the bathrooms and telephones, availability of coffee, snacks, objectives of the workshop, handouts, materials for purchase, etc.
2. Place a stack of index cards on the table. Write a question for each piece of information you want to share with participants on the *bottom half* of each card. One question might be, "Where is the women's restroom?"
3. Write the answer on the *top half* of the next card. Your goal is to loop the index cards in such a way that the answers and the questions will ultimately form a chain of dominoes. Put the answer to your last question on the top half of the first card.
4. During the workshop, distribute one card to each participant.
5. Each participant should walk around the room until they find the person who can answer the question on their card.
6. To end this activity, have each person ask his or her question in front of the group and have the appropriate person answer it.



L
Let your advance

worrying become

advance thinking and

planning.

– Winston Churchill

Effective visuals

T*The average adult forgets 25 percent within one hour and forgets 85 percent within one week. It takes 21 attempts at something new for an adult to establish a pattern and 100 times for something to become routine. (A child requires only 10 attempts and 85 times to become routine.)*

– Judy-Arin Krupp

Visuals

Keep them simple! Each visual should convey one idea.

Use key words and bullets or other graphics to emphasize the main points.

Use no more than six lines of text on any visual.

Keep the lower one-third of the transparency free.

Use color.

Check for errors. Often, a misspelled word or other usage error can keep participants from seeing and hearing your powerful message.

Make lettering readable from a distance.

Keep the visual straight on the screen.

Avoid a blank, lit transparency screen.

Carefully organize your transparencies for an easily managed presentation.

Handouts

Select material that can be reused by participants.

Give a full reference to the handout if you are using information that you did not create yourself.

Add variety, increase interest, but remember that you should put your handouts on lightly-colored paper. Avoid fluorescent or bold colors that scream at participants.

Print materials legibly and squarely on the paper.

Provide a cover sheet for your handouts with the title, date, and presenter information.

Number the pages.

Three-hole punch your packet.

Bring extra handouts. Having an additional 10 percent available is wise. If you run out, offer to mail handouts to participants.

Adapted from recommendations provided to presenters at the NSDC Annual Conference each year.

After the workshop

COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR: This activity catches participants off guard and encourages them to think about what they will need to do to use what they have learned in the workshop.

TIME: 20 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Paper/index cards, pencils, flip chart and markers.

Directions

1. Distribute sheets of paper or index cards to each participant.
2. Write this question on a flip chart and reveal it as you ask participants to answer the question:
 - What can I do to ensure that I will not change the way I work because of what I have learned in this workshop?
3. Suggest that participants consider these questions as they respond.
 - What can you think about to prevent yourself/discourage yourself from using new ideas?
 - How can you interact with other teachers or with your principal to ensure that won't try anything new?
 - What can you do with your workshop materials to ensure that you won't use them or refer to them again?
4. Invite participants to share their suggestions with the rest of the group. Record 10-12 of their suggestions on the flip chart.
5. Ask participants to suggest ways to turn those negative responses into positive responses. Record those suggestions on the flip chart as well.
6. Encourage more discussion about how they can take their ideas home. A good reference for this is the April/May 1999 issue of *Tools for Schools*.



We tend to teach to our right.

Make an effort to teach to the

left also. Consider placing the

easel on the left as a reminder.

Source: Tips for Trainers

by Deborah G. Estes

Summarizing the workshop

1

My expectations for this workshop were:

2

In this workshop, I have learned:

3

Now I face these issues:

4

I still have questions about:

5

To successfully implement what I have learned in this workshop, I need:

Learning about effective workshops

- *Energize Your Meetings with Laughter* by Sheila Feigelson. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD, 1998. Vivid anecdotes and practical examples demonstrate how meetings can be planned to incorporate humor. Stock # 198055. Price: \$13.95. To order, call (800) 933-2723.
- *How to Make Presentations that Teach and Transform* by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD, 1992. Guide to designing and delivering interesting and effective presentations for adult audiences. Covers the five stages of a presentation, offering pointers on how to execute each one. Stock # 611-92147. Price: \$6.95. To order, call (800) 933-2723.
- *Sharing Your Good Ideas: A Workshop Facilitator's Handbook* by Peggy Sharp. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993. Offers numerous suggestions for getting ready for workshops, facilitation tips and more.
- *Price: \$21. To order, call (800) 793-2154, fax (800) 847-0938, or e-mail custserv@heinemann.com.*
- *Inside Microsoft PowerPoint* newsletter. Monthly newsletter that offers numerous helpful suggestions for anyone who uses PowerPoint presentations. Published by ZD Journals, Rochester, N.Y. For subscription information, call (800) 223-8720 or (716) 240-7301.
- Presentations by Robert Garmston. A quarterly column in the *Journal of Staff Development* intended to help sharpen the skills needed to make interesting and effective presentations for adult learners.
- Skill Shop by Robby Champion. A quarterly column in the *Journal of Staff Development* intended to introduce skills that are needed by educators providing staff development leadership in a variety of school settings.

'NEVER EVERS' REFERENCES

- Here are references for "The 'Never Evers' of Workshop Facilitation," by Peggy A. Sharp.
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Finding just the right words

Ask Dr. Developer



Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask. (At least he thinks he does!)

Q *I'm always intrigued by the quotations that I see others use in their presentations. I'd like to use more in my own. Can you suggest some resources for me?*

A The best way to find quotations that will work for you is to read widely and draw quotations from material that has had meaning for you. Keep a notebook where you can jot down quotations or keep a file in your computer where you can list them as you discover a new one you like.

However, I have to say that the Internet now offers us a vast array of sources online that make it a great deal of fun to go search-

ing for just the right quotation to use.

The NSDC web site, for example, has a feature called Powerful Words which lists quotations that are especially useful for staff developers. You can go to that page directly by visiting www.nsd.org/words.htm.

In addition, here's a list of web sites that specialize in quotations. Most of these sites were recommended in the November 1999 issue of the *Inside Microsoft PowerPoint*. (See Page 7 for ordering information.)

Although all of these addresses were doublechecked before publication, you should be aware that web addresses change frequently. Be prepared to use one of the many available search engines to locate what you need.

Power Quotations from Famous People

www.hansonmarketing.com/guest4-a.html

Words of Wisdom

members.tripod.com/h_and_t/wisdom/html

Greenleaf Enterprises, Inc. Famous Quotations

www.greenleafenterprises.com/quotes.asp

Book of Famous Quotes

www.geocities.com/Athens/7186

Famous Quotations Network

www.famous-quotations.com

Aphorisms Galore

www.aphorismsgalore.com

Inspiration Peak

www.inspirationpeak.com

On Matters of Most Grave Concern

www.greatbasin.net/~doconnor/index.html

Quotes on Listening

www.listen.org/pages/quotes.html

Oneliners and Proverbs

www.oneliners-and-proverbs.com/

Quotation Center

cyber-nation.com/victory/quotations

Motivating Moments

www.motivateus.com

The Quotation Guide

life.bio.sunysb.edu/ee/msr/quote.html

The Quotations Page

www.starlingtech.com/quotes/

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