



HOW TO SELECT A FACILITATOR

Your choice of a facilitator can determine if the meeting is a success or a failure.

Use these questions to make sure that you are working with the right person.

> Is the person a professional facilitator?

There is more to facilitation than watching people talk. Facilitation is a complex activity requiring a special blend of sophisticated skills. You want someone who can identify the real goals for your meeting, plan an agenda that produces a result, guide people to find their best answers, and maintain a working environment for a fair process. That is, you want someone who specializes in helping people hold effective meetings. One clue comes from asking if the candidate facilitator is a member of the International Association of Facilitators. Dedicated professionals belong to the associations that serve their discipline.

> Has the person earned recognition as a facilitator?

The International Association of Facilitators grants the Certified Professional Facilitator designation based on a rigorous skill-based assessment. Candidates must pass 1) a lengthy written application describing their experience, 2) two oral exams conducted by certified examiners, and 3) a live demonstration of meeting facilitation where one of the examiners attempts to disrupt the meeting. You gain added assurance when you work with a CPF.

> Does the person understand meetings?

That is, does the candidate know how to set up, plan, and conduct an effective meeting? Does he know how to keep a meeting on track? Does she know how to maintain a productive, safe environment that allows the participants to work at their creative best?

> Does the person understand business?

You want a facilitator who understands the dynamics and challenges that occur in business. You want someone who can speak intelligently with your executives and staff. You want someone who has worked for a business and attended real business meetings.

> Does the person work hard to understand the purpose of your meeting?

If you talk to someone who seems too quick to accept your project, be cautious. A skilled facilitator will ask many questions to understand what you want before agreeing to help you. This helps identify if your meeting fits the facilitator's expertise -- some types of meetings may not. And it determines the amount of effort required.

> Does the person offer to help prepare an agenda?

The agenda is the blueprint for the meeting. Properly prepared, everything should work smoothly. A skilled facilitator will most likely spend more time preparing the agenda than facilitating the meeting.

> Does the person offer to talk to the participants?

Such conversations are essential. They reveal the participants' expectations and private agendas. They gather background information. And they serve to enlist the participants' support for the meeting.

> Does the person apply a variety of process tools?

Each meeting is different. And thus each meeting requires different process tools to obtain useful results. Some people use one process for everything - and while that can work in some cases, it is a significant limitation.

> Does the person tell you about your role in the meeting?

Certainly you want directions on how to set up the room, what resources to obtain, and how to maximize the effectiveness of your participation.

> Does the person charge a realistic fee?

Professional facilitators charge realistic fees that are consistent with the value of their work. A low fee, however, should serve as a warning. Beginners, amateurs, and part time entrepreneurs charge low fees. Realize that the most expensive part of a meeting is the cost of the participant's time. Saving money on a facilitator can ruin the meeting. On the other hand, a huge fee indicates that the person is either a celebrity or works for a firm with large overhead.