

What is a Facilitator?

By: Bill Campbell

Do we just make sure everyone gets introduced?

A facilitator is not a person who is in charge of the business facilities. Rather, a facilitator is a person who is responsible for the flow of information and to stimulate thinking. Facilitators are responsible for facilitating a meeting, not running it. Our major role is to make sure the meeting is moving along and not monopolized by any single person.

On several occasions people have asked me why a CEO Roundtable needs to have a facilitator. Without understanding what a facilitator is and what our role is, this would seem to be a peculiar question. My answer is always the same; CEOs, which are thought to be business experts, (that is a topic for another article) are simply having a discussion and providing information to each other and in most cases, one of these CEOs may decide he or she is the world's foremost expert and turns the discussion into some awkward training session. This is where the facilitator comes in and is valuable. Again our role is to make sure the meeting or discussion moves along as smooth as possible. In the case of a roundtable, another one of our responsibilities is to make sure every member at the discussion has a chance to participate and doesn't feel left out. If a member leaves the meeting with the feeling that they didn't get a chance to participate, the meeting was not only unproductive for them, but potentially unproductive for every member of the meeting. This could have been a lost opportunity for an idea, solution, or just good conversation.

The skill set of a facilitator really lies within their personality. As with management styles, there are different facilitator styles. I believe experience, personality, and leadership traits are what determine the type of facilitator you will be. A good basic set of characteristics are:

- ✓ Being persuasive rather than authoritative (ask instead of telling)
- ✓ Ability to initiate a conversation (not being a wallflower)
- ✓ Superior listening skills
- ✓ Self Confidence (not arrogance)
- ✓ Being Enthusiastic and Outgoing
- ✓ Strategic
- ✓ Big picture (visionary)
- ✓ Relationship builder

As facilitators, we not only have to know how to start a meeting and move it along, we must know how to properly conclude a meeting. It is very important that the facilitator closes the meeting on time. Although for different reasons, sometimes this doesn't happen. The success of a meeting is determined by how the facilitator was able to translate the conversation and invoke complete participation.

Finally, a crucial factor in facilitating a successful meeting is to make sure your participants feel confident in expressing their views.

Bill Campbell is the Co-Founder and CEO of CEOJunction™, a membership and networking organization for small business CEOs and business owners. You can contact him at bcampbell@CEOJunction.com.