How to Be a Successful HMV Facilitator

Paul Davidson, PhD 2015 FJMC International Convention

The Basics

• Anyone with an interest in encouraging group discussion can be a facilitator
• Almost anyone has the potential to be a great facilitator if he can relate to the topic on a highly personal level
• You do not have to be a mental health professional or religious leader to do well
• Create a welcoming environment from the beginning, introducing yourself to all members
• Spell out the ground rules of HMV:
  Talk about your own thoughts and feelings
  Respect others
  What is said in HMV stays in HMV
• Have everyone go around the circle and introduce themselves
  Each should say his name, either why they came or hope to get out of it
  This breaks the ice to get everyone speaking
• Always start by introducing the topic
• It often best to lead with a personal story to share
• The facilitator sets the tone
  The more personal the sharing, the more personal the group sharing
• Generally, the less the facilitator speaks, the better
• Enthusiasm goes a long way to engaging people in the session

Framing the Discussion

• Questions should ideally be open ended, not “yes or no”
• Use the interrogative pronouns: who, what, when, where, why and how
• Questions that frame the issue in time
  § How something has changed over your lifetime
  § The difference in something from one generation to another
  § Pinpoint times in your life that the topic held specific meaning
• Questions that frame the issue in impact
  § How you have been affected by the topic
  § Ways the topic has affected family, community, etc.
• Questions which address feelings
  § What the topic has meant to you
  § How you have come to feel the way you do about the topic
• Questions which clarify how the issue ties you to others
  § What you feel in common with others around regarding the topic
  § Where you differ from others regarding the topic
• Questions which relate to other parts of your life
  § When and how the issue may affect your work, spiritual life, etc.
• How the issue affects your well-being
• It is OK for the discussion to move off topic as long as it amplifies involvement, but you should try to find an opportune moment to redirect to the issue at hand
• While no one is obligated to speak, it is OK to call on someone you believe has something to add
• If you select the topic carefully, the discussion will naturally unfold

Handling Problems
• Potential problems, though rare, can disrupt the HMV experience, so be prepared
• You ask a question and no one responds
  Rephrase the question more simply
  Start the discussion by being the first to respond to the question
  Call on someone who is likely to respond
  Ask participants to think about the question for a moment, and then go around the circle for feedback
  Remind members that this is not a lecture and we are here to listen to one another
• Someone is dominating the discussion
  You can sensitively shift the focus of attention away from that participant
  Acknowledge what was said but you want to give everyone a chance to contribute
  Summarize what the person said and move on
  Ask others how they feel about what the individual has said
  Directly call on someone else in the group
  Transition to another question
• Someone becomes very emotional about a topic
  Let it flow and validate the feelings
  Tell them that it is healthy to express emotions
  Remind the group that this is a safe place for expression
  You can state that their emotions are understandable given their experiences
  Ask if anyone else can relate to those feelings
  Thank him for his honesty
• If discussion wanes, either pose another question or tell another personal story