

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADING A FOCUSED DISCUSSION

SITUATION	WHAT TO DO
START THE DISCUSSION	Set up the room in a manner that will help to minimize distractions. When you begin, provide background information and set the context for the discussion. Also, you can ask a specific question to get the group started.
GET THE GROUP TO ANALYZE THE PROBLEM	Have the group first clarify why there is a problem before they start identifying what the problem actually is. To get at the root of the problem, consider asking the group a series of “why” questions (e.g., Why does this keep occurring? OK, now why is <i>that</i> happening?) When the group identifies multiple problems, have the group prioritize their concerns. Also, it is important to get all team members to consider their role in causing/perpetuating the problem.
KEEP TRACK OF IDEAS	Ask the group to identify various ways to solving the problem(s). Always take some notes. Also, ensure that a scribe is recording the group’s ideas (perhaps on a flipchart). Periodically review the list of ideas to ensure that none have been forgotten. Notes and flipcharts can be used to generate meeting minutes.
HELP THE GROUP MAINTAIN FOCUS	If the team begins to wander away from the subject, summarize what has been accomplished so far. Add to a “Parking Lot” when ideas are not relevant to the current agenda item. Refer back to the agenda, or restate the initial question posed to the group. If a team member begins to “grandstand” or monopolize the conversation, ask him/her for a specific example; then, ask others to comment or share additional examples. If no one answers a question, pause for approximately 10 seconds and then ask the question once again.
KEEP THE DISCUSSION PRACTICAL	When possible, avoid asking questions that are highly complex or abstract. If a team member provides a response or answer that is too abstract or judgmental, ask him/her to provide a specific example from his/her own personal experience.
FACILITATE RESOLUTION OF DISAGREEMENTS	Remember that not all disagreements can be resolved during a meeting. Also, if an argument occurs, refrain from taking sides; instead, facilitate mutual understanding and problem solving. Also, when a team member disagrees with something, get him/her to share specifics. Clarification can help resolve many disagreements.
BRING THE DISCUSSION TO A CLOSE	Summarize the discussion. Get the team to evaluate the pros and cons of proposed solutions; then, have them come to consensus and make decisions. Create an implementation plan.

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