



Collaborative tools, services and training

Meet smarter, not harder!

training events coming up

Brisbane

Group Facilitation Methods

8–9 September 2009

Contact: Gerard Keating

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Working with Value Systems

30 September–1 October 2009

Contact: Elaine Richmond

emr@iinet.net.au

Group Facilitation Methods

9–10 February 2010

Contact: Elaine Richmond

emr@iinet.net.au

Strategic Thinking & Planning

20–21 April 2010

Contact: David Jago

david@smartmeetings.com.au

Understanding & Leading Change

15–16 June 2010

Contact: Elaine Richmond

emr@iinet.net.au

Canberra

Embracing Diversity, Uncertainty & Change

15–16 June + 24–25 August 2009

Contact: Mark Butz

mark.butz@bigpond.com

Melbourne

Facilitating and Leading in Groups

18–20 May + 12–14 August 2009

Contact: Sue Gregory

spgregory5@optusnet.com.au

Being a Facilitative Leader

27–28 October 2009

Contact: Sue Gregory

spgregory5@optusnet.com.au

please pass this on

If you found this newsletter helpful, please pass it on to someone who may be interested.

Tools of the Trade: The Question

Like journalists, facilitative leaders are interested in the gentle art of questioning. The quality of your questions has a critical impact on the quality of what you can achieve.

Once, when hunting around on the web, I came across an article written by a chap called Chip Scanlan. The title was [Tools of the Trade: The Question](#).

Scanlan's article contains some effective exhibits of questions that don't & do work. In each case, he teases out why they fail or succeed.

One indicator he gives is the ratio of question length to answer length. In one case the question, at 107 words, was longer than the 82-word answer. Conversely his Exhibit 3 illustrated:

...how a short question (27 words) invites and provokes a much longer (212 word) response. But it's not just quantity... here the result is an answer that provides a nuanced, complete response that would help the reporter understand — and more effectively communicate to the public...

Towards better questions

Scanlan ends with [A Prescription for Healthier Questions](#) which also works for the facilitative leader. Here's a composite set of tips:

1. Whenever possible, **prepare** questions in advance. (Proper planning prevents poor performance...)
2. Ask **open-ended** questions. Questions that start with what, how, or why tend to get more complete responses. It's about opening out the space and expanding the information available to everyone.
3. **One question** at a time. When the Chasers fire off [10 quick questions](#) at an unsuspecting celebrity it makes for good comedy, not good answers. People do need time to respond.
4. Let the **questions do the work**. A small amount of background is often good. Too much is just confusing and can make folks defensive. It's also pretty silly if your question is lost in all the verbiage. Also, don't anticipate the response.
5. The **intent behind your question** counts for a lot. You're **not** a barrister grilling a 'hostile' witness or a current affairs reporter harassing an subject into making a mistake. You **are** there to enable a group to build a shared understanding. This requires a "yes, and also..." approach.

So, what's your experience of successful questions? Please, go online and post a comment.

Go well!

David

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