

Facilitated Discussion

What is a Facilitated Discussion?

Purpose – for Supervisors & Employees: The primary purpose of a facilitated discussion including both supervisor and employee is to foster communication between supervisor and employee by identifying common goals and thereby creating, or re-creating, a work environment that enables high communication and high productivity.

In other words, management should not look to a facilitated discussion to justify previous employment actions, nor should it be relied upon as the only resource to finalize action plans “in stone.” Supervisors want to be sure they preserve the rights of their employees with the hopes of keeping lines of communication open, and therefore might request a facilitated discussion to ease the tension they perceive might have resulted from an employment action.

Likewise, the discussion should not be perceived by the employee as an opportunity to “change the minds” of the management team. The management team is responsible for evaluating their employees’ annual performance. Employees want to avoid discussions regarding employment actions with their peers as it is disruptive to group morale and productivity, and therefore might request a facilitated discussion to ease the tension they perceive might result from their requesting clarification from, or reconsideration by, their supervisor.

Purpose – for Co-Workers; Peers; etc.: The primary purpose of a facilitated discussion between peers is to foster communication by identifying common goals and thereby creating, or re-creating, a work environment that enables high communication and high productivity.

Participants in the facilitation have an opportunity to express their feelings in a non-threatening environment. However, both parties to a facilitated discussion between peers need to be willing to listen, learn, and understand that each may need to compromise in order to reach the best possible outcome.

Definition –Clarification: A facilitated discussion should not be perceived as an opportunity for a win-lose contest.

The facilitated discussion process allows participants to learn more about each other’s styles and preferences, so as to create opportunity for respecting differences.

Ground rules:

- Do not make personal attacks, innuendos, or other assertions about the personality, intent, or motivation of a person.
- Respond to the substance of the comments, not the person’s character.

- Before reacting, ask the sender to clarify his or her meaning. Although back and forth probing and questioning are natural elements of dialogue, the discussion should focus on the issue, providing evidence to the contrary or counter-argument directed only at the issue. Dialogue and debate can be passionate, so long as courtesy and respect for all participants is maintained.
- When we are born, we have the common sense that there are other minds out there. When we get older, we seem to forget this. When listening to others, try to go back to when you really knew there were these other minds out there and that they are important. Have fun too!

Format:

A facilitated discussion is an informal process in which participants can talk to each other in the presence of an objective third party. On the whole, personal authority is a weak case even when the participant may be an acknowledged expert. His or her bias in a particular discussion may cause their experience or knowledge to be discounted. The facilitator reserves the right to act on dialogue containing personal attacks or other potentially inflammatory messages by redirecting them back to the sender.

It's fine to go into a meeting with some questions to ask. But be free enough to listen to the answers and tailor more questions as needed. Some preparation is helpful. Over preparing can bog things down with approaches and questions that may lack effectiveness.

Be prepared to answer what you want to come out of the facilitated discussion.

Make sure that decisions and action items that come out of the meeting are agreed upon and documented by the participants. The facilitator will not *require* participants to sign any agreements, and no tape recording is permitted.

Facilitation will not resolve every issue, but participation in a facilitated discussion is usually an acknowledgement that each participant is willing to hear what the other has to say.

Anyone interested in participating or learning more about Facilitated Discussions should contact:

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