



## **Un-Strategies for Multicultural Facilitation: Avoiding Twelve Facilitative Pitfalls**

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- 1) Know your hot buttons and have strategies for dealing with them—do NOT use the dialogue for your own processing. Process your hot buttons before and/or after, but never during, a dialogue you're facilitating. If you work with a team of facilitators, plan meetings to process the issues that are difficult for you.
- 2) Be clear and honest about the purpose of the dialogue or experience you're facilitating. Participants should never have to inquire about the purpose of the dialogue during or after the experience.
- 3) Provide airtime. You should never talk more than your participants. In fact, the more airtime taken by participants, the better you've performed as a facilitator. Don't feel like you must respond to every comment. Work to ensure that you are not the central aspect of the dialogue—the content of the dialogue and interaction among participants should always be central.
- 4) Reject the first-hand-up, first-called-on approach to facilitation. Allow several seconds to pass before you call on someone so that quieter folks who reflect as the dialogue goes on can catch up and participate.
- 5) Make ground rules clear at the beginning and call people on them early and often. If you don't address breaches of ground rules early, you will not be able to enforce them when you most desperately need to do so.
- 6) You are responsible for providing everyone an equitable opportunity to participate. Equitable participation does not mean that everyone speaks the same amount of time—it

means everyone, regardless of participation style, has an equal opportunity to be heard. You can't be afraid to challenge people who dominate the conversation no matter how uncomfortable that sort of confrontation can be.

- 7) Never ask participants to share something that you are unwilling to share. Make yourself vulnerable and be a model by sharing first on activities whenever possible. Be a model self-critique and self-examination by sharing first when possible.
- 8) Do not pretend to have the answer to every question. When possible, bounce questions back to the whole group before you answer them yourself, even if they're directed to you from a participant.
- 9) Thoughtfully planned and executed activities can lead to fruitful dialogue, but don't fill so much time with activities that no time remains for dialogue. When you do use activities, choose those that pull from participants' personal experience instead of those that synthesize personal experience.
- 10) Identify your strengths as a facilitator and build your plans around them. If you fill the dialogue with topics and activities with which you're uncomfortable, participants will notice your lack of confidence and take advantage of it.
- 11) Even if you want to be "objective" you cannot allow the dialogue to become yet another place where underrepresented groups are oppressed. Be an advocate for all participants, but particularly for those who have, until now, been silenced.
- 12) Too often, participants feel that dialogues end too suddenly without a clear progression to closure. Develop strategies for dialogue closure so that you can facilitate this progression effectively. This does not mean that you should wrap up the conversation for everyone but instead that you should have some strategy in mind for drawing the dialogue to a close through a final question, short activity, or commitment to action.