



Facilitating with Ease

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What you'll receive:

- A thorough understanding of the meeting facilitator's role and best practices
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Earn 14 PDUs as you hone your meeting facilitation skills!



For details or registration:

416-465-9494

Toronto: Fall 2010

Regina: October 20-21

Engaging Meeting Openings:

How to get participants excited and committed at your next meeting

How many meetings have you attended where the facilitator or chair began by reviewing the agenda and then started the discussion?

According to [Michael Wilkinson](#), the two most important questions facilitators should answer for meeting participants at the very beginning of a meeting are:

- **Why am I here?**
- **Why should I care?**

To answer the first question, "why am I here?" demands that you make your meetings **POP** (**P**urpose **O**utcomes and **P**rocess). When participants understand **why** the meeting was convened (the Purpose), **what** they'll walk away with (the Outcomes), and **how** they're going to work together (the Process), much of the usual confusion clears.

Asking participants to articulate in their own words why they think they're at the meeting also enables the meeting leader to gauge the group's understanding of the meeting's purpose and desired outcomes. If several individuals articulate the same outcomes but different purpose, or if participants expect different outcomes, the meeting leader must spend time up front helping the group agree on the exact purpose and outcomes, or conflict will emerge. As well, being clear about the degree of decision-making authority or 'empowerment' that the group has prevents misconceptions of believing that we're more empowered than we are. There's no worse feeling than thinking you're in a decision-making meeting when in fact the decision was made already and you're there to 'rubber stamp' it!

Let's move on to the second question, "why should I care?" Explaining the benefits of the meeting and why it should be important to the participants helps build buy-in and energy right from the start, so Wilkinson refers to this explanation as the "excite statement." Compare these two sample meeting openings:

Meeting Opening Example One

Welcome everyone; it's a pleasure to be here. Let me start by reviewing why we are here. The purpose of this meeting is to fix our customer complaints process. When we are done we will have three things: a diagram that shows how the new process will work, a list of benefits of the new process, and a step-by-step plan for getting this new process implemented.

Meeting Opening Example One, Continued

What's exciting about this?

If we're successful, we will walk away with a new complaints process that will help our organization respond to consumer concerns in a relevant manner.

Meeting Opening Example Two

Welcome everyone; it's a pleasure to be here. Let me start by reviewing why we are here. The purpose of this meeting is to fix our customer complaints process. When we are done we will have three things: a diagram that shows how the new process will work, a list of benefits of the new process, and a step-by-step plan for getting this new process implemented.

What's exciting about this?

Today you're straddled with a complaints system that punishes you for your efforts to adequately resolve consumer concerns. As a result, you have to sacrifice customer service to stay on script and on time. This is your opportunity to put strategies in place to ensure we all respond to client concerns in a relevant manner.

The second opening does a better job of describing the benefits to each meeting participant. Wilkinson argues that a key secret to getting people excited about participating in a meeting is to explain what's in it for them (the WIIFM). And you can help ensure you do this well by **including the words "you" or "your" at least four times** in the excite statement. This may seem like overkill when you first try out excite statements, so let participant reactions rather than your inner censor be your guide.

In conclusion, clarifying the meeting POP and providing a compelling excite statement can go a long way to engaging participants at your next meeting. Try it out and let us know the results!

The [Facilitation First](#) home office team
Collaborative meetings. Expert results.

A Note on Empowerment

We mentioned "empowerment" or levels of authority earlier in this article. Here's a chart we think helps clarify the role of the group (first row), appropriate facilitation processes (bottom row) and whether the group is being 'told' or being 'asked' regarding the issue of the day.

Directive	Consultative	Participative	Delegative
Decision made; meeting held to <u>communicate</u> decision and address questions	Management will make the decision, but seeks <u>input</u> before decision is finalized	Management sets parameters, group to make <u>recommendation</u> ; veto reserved by management	Group authorized to <u>decide</u> and implement, based on manager's macro parameters
TELL		ASK	
Q & A	Feedback	Decision-making, problem-solving, budgeting, Planning, restructuring, etc.	