

The Art of Co-Facilitating

by David Bulger

Learning events that are co-facilitated can pose unique challenges, but the payoff is worth the risk. Two (or more) facilitators, when they work well together, can bring different styles, varied perspectives and model teamwork.

If you are the 'senior' facilitator...

- 1. Build the relationship.** Even when multiple facilitators are coming together for a single learning event, the opportunity for relationship is critical. Facilitating a learning event is more than coordination and mechanics. Relationship is key in the learning process, including between facilitators where both the senior and junior are free, open and confident with each other. Seniors need to take steps to welcome the junior into whatever level of relationship is appropriate for the process.
- 2. Share the stages.** The more you work together on all aspects of the learning event, the better your facilitation. Invite your co-facilitator to be involved in every stage of the learning process – the pre-event needs assessment, the event design, communication with the learners and in the post-event evaluation. The more you do together, the more effective your facilitation will be in the event itself.
- 3. Pass the mic.** We know that in a learning event, everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. Resist the temptation, as the senior facilitator, to teach the bulk of the content, leaving your junior on the proverbial bench. Rather, look for opportunities to deploy the junior as much as possible. Invite your junior to facilitate content that they're comfortable with as well as content where they want/need to be stretched. In the event, invite their contribution and experience, not just their observation.
- 4. Invite the 'jump in.'** Sometimes, in learning events, one facilitator observes things that the other facilitator doesn't catch: miscommunication, lack of clarity, etc. Extend permission for your (junior) co-facilitator to jump in with clarifying questions and comments, to improve communication and understanding. Encourage your co-facilitator to be fully engaged in the whole learning event, not only during the learning tasks where they are up front. Strive to be seamless as you go back and forth during sessions, extending permissions and words of appreciation.
- 5. Debrief, specifically.** With your co-facilitator, reflect on the learning event and debrief its aspects. Take good notes during the event, to be able to refer to specific moments



and activities. Provide feedback as soon as possible after the learning event, verbally and in writing. If the event is a multi-day event, take time to reflect together at the end of each day. Look for opportunities to provide encouragement during the event as well during breaks.

6. **Share the 'why.'** Co-facilitating is more than effectively hitting the teaching points or making smooth transitions. Effective co-facilitators are fully versed in the deeper aspects of the learning event. To help your junior grow, help them understand the 'why' of the event and the learning tasks. Season your mentoring and feedback with the deeper significance of specific activities. Connect tasks and actions with good, underlying significance. Help them own all aspects of the learning process.
7. **Solicit feedback from learners.** Learners experience and make observations about co-facilitators and their efforts to work together. In private, ask select learners for feedback – on the event, co-facilitation, and on your junior colleague. Ask specific questions about aspects of your junior's facilitation. Their perspective will be helpful.

If you are the 'junior' facilitator...

8. **Ask for feedback.** And ask for it again. Go into a learning event knowing where you want to stretch and grow, and ask for input in those areas. Ask your senior co-facilitator about specific instances in the event, ones that you were facilitating and ones conducted by them. Take notes from the feedback you receive, and turn them into action points for your future development.
9. **Make it your own.** As you observe, learn and grow, recognize that your style and facilitation strengths will be different from others. Don't focus on reproducing what your colleague does or the way they do it. Rather, concentrate on your strengths. Bring yourself to your facilitation – your expertise, your personality, your experiences, your character and your type of energy. Make the content fit in a way that feels natural and authentic.

And finally...

10. **Celebrate together!** After an event, project or activity, we tend to focus on what could have been better or different. Wait! Before entertaining such a question, *celebrate!* Take time to mark the moment, to commemorate the completion of good work, to affirm one another and to revel in your accomplishment. Have fun, rejoice in what you've done together and express gratitude for a job well done. Not to worry, those 'improvement' questions will sit and wait patiently for you...😊

What other tips do you have for co-facilitating learning events?

* * * * *

[David Bulger](mailto:davidbulger@oci.org) (davidbulger@oci.org) is Leadership Development Strategist with One Challenge International, a mission organization based in Colorado, USA. He provides



teaching, training, consulting and leadership development for churches and ministry organizations globally.