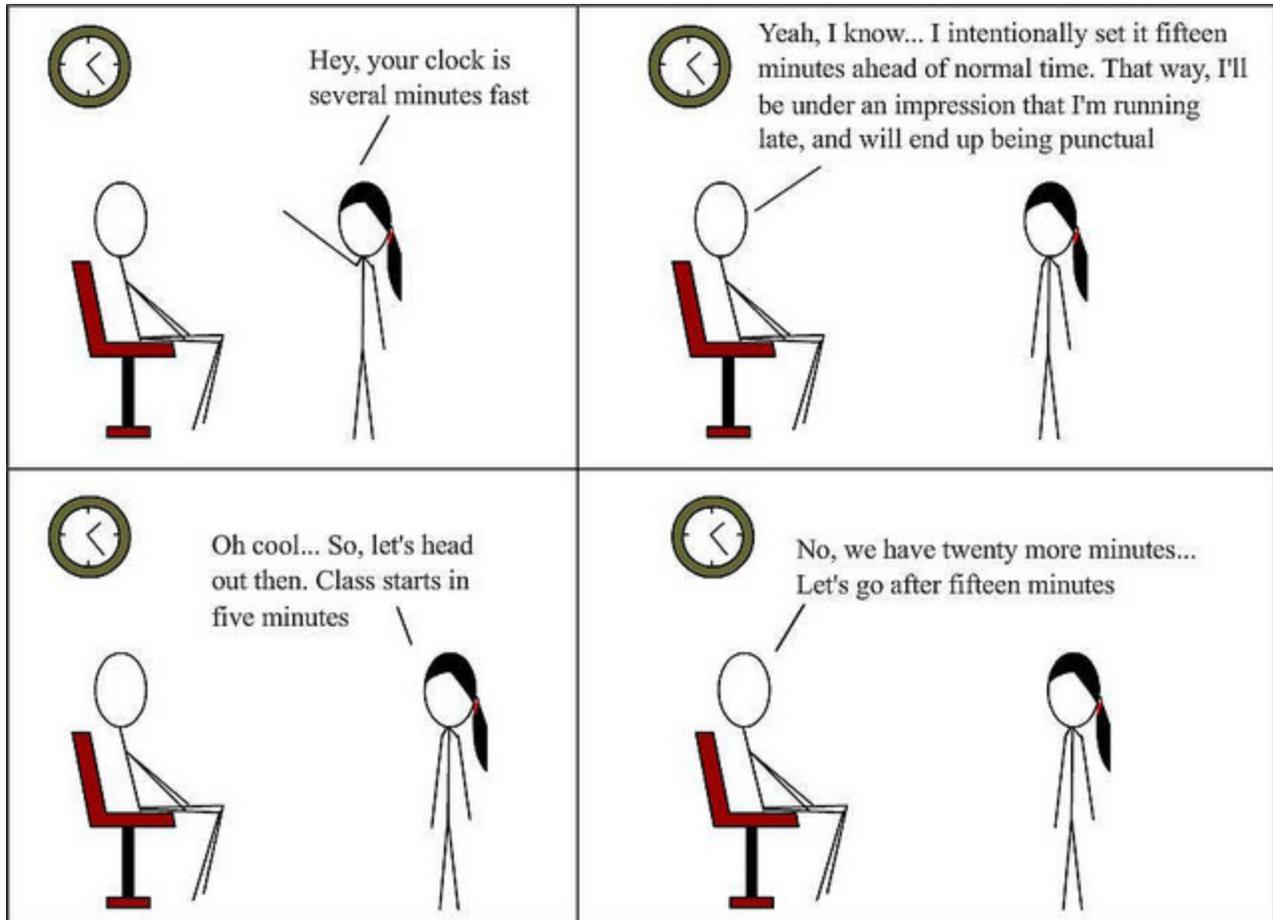


The Art of Facilitation: The Importance of Punctuality

by Joan Dempsey



"Promptitude is not only a duty, but is also a part of good manners; it is favorable to fortune, reputation, influence, and usefulness; a little attention and energy will form the habit, so as to make it easy and delightful."

~ Charles Simmons

We've all done it: started meetings late; allowed workshops to go beyond stated end times; and come back five minutes late from breaks. This is a pet peeve, I must admit. I'm almost always on time (or early), and it drives me crazy when others are not. It feels disrespectful to me. And yet I also understand that there are people out there for whom it isn't a simple thing to be on time, and some for whom being chronically late is a psychological problem. Still, if you're teaching, being on time is critically important. "The consequences of being chronically late run deeper than many people realize, according to psychologist Linda Sapadin, PhD, author of

Master Your Fears. ‘You’re creating a reputation for yourself, and it’s not the best reputation to be establishing. People feel they can’t trust you or rely on you, so it impacts relationships. It also impacts self-esteem.’” For those of us who practice Dialogue Education, we know that a breach of trust can impact a learner’s feelings of respect and safety, two critical principles for effective learning. So what can you do to learn to be on time, especially if you’re chronically late? Here are some helpful tips for those who are late in many areas of their lives.

Here are two tips on time management: **TIP #1:** The ‘parking lot’ technique can help people stay on topic and on time – without losing valuable ideas, questions, or concerns which are peripheral to the current content. By ‘parking’ them temporarily on a highly visible flip chart, you communicate the importance of these items and your commitment to addressing them . . . but not right now. *You may choose to address them in a future task, in private or in the course report.* **TIP #2:** Running out of time at the end of a workshop is a common problem for many facilitators. Even if you have a tried-and-tested workshop design, you can get into trouble without a clear time management strategy. Some ways to do this include:

- set the time out loud for each working task;
- have a clock in sight at all times; and
- write the timing for each task in your manual and try to stick to it (practice in advance).

And here are some other tips:

- strip content out of your learning event – having too much WHAT for the WHEN (or too much content for the allotted time) is a common problem, even among people skilled at Dialogue Education;
- get in the habit of routine time checks throughout your learning event;
- if technology is involved, start 10-15 minutes early to make sure the technology works – be transparent that this is why you’re starting early;
- if you’re on time and others are not, always be a model: start on time, end on time, show up when you’re supposed to;
- don’t be afraid to end something early.

As Shakespeare said, “better three hours too soon than one minute too late.”