

Facilitator's Toolbox

Show Instead of Tell

From "Initial Facilitator Training" by Susan Hollister, SGM Institute, August 2011

One of the facilitator's leadership responsibilities is to model behavior and responses in the covenant group setting. At the group's first meeting, model check-in by going first. Speak for about two minutes and share a significant experience. Then turn to the person beside you and say their name, indicating that it's their turn.

Help the group transition from surface to transparent communication by modeling openness. Take off your mask, let the group see the real you, and they'll begin to do the same.

Also model *deep listening* for the group; that is, listening without interrupting and without the intent to respond. "Listen as if the speaker is the most important person in the world. Listen for what lights the speaker up and gives enjoyment to his or her life. Also listen to what is being said from the heart ('I feel') as opposed to from the head ('I think')." (*The Art of Facilitation, 1995, pg. 25*)

Respectful listening will be a new concept for some group members and may take some practice. Having others *just listen* rarely happens in our busy world. The experience is affirming and builds trust among group members.

At the first meeting only, be the first person to respond to a question. This sets the model for length and content. Use "I" statements and talk about personal experiences and feelings. Model speaking to the entire group and making eye contact with each person. After sharing, be silent and wait for another person to speak.

By the second meeting, *remain silent* after asking each question. Allow the group time to process and reflect on how the questions relate to their lives. Many groups purposely allow one minute or more of silence after each question is read.

Silences are normal and desirable in a small group. It means the members are taking time to reflect before answering. Facilitators are guides; we participate, but we allow the group members to do most of the talking.

Learn to welcome and be comfortable with the silence; it is a gift to each other, a sacred space in time. Resist the urge to fill the silence with chatter—it will be distracting to the group. Even a comment as innocuous as "Next" will be received as an invasion of reflection time. The group will respond when they're ready. Observe when people start looking up, a cue that they're ready to move on.

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Fall 2011