



One

Heard on the Street

The Audience Does Know!

“I want them walking out of my office feeling better than when they walked in.”

—Mehmood Khan, MD, FACE; CEO, Global Nutrition Group; SVP and
Chief Science Officer, PepsiCo

- Audience involvement results in audience satisfaction, significant learning, and achieved outcomes.
- Facilitator fearlessness begins with courage to lead from personal power, not superiority.
- Fearless facilitation is a courageous activity for both the speaker and the audience.

The Audience Doesn't Lie

If you have ever been in charge of a meeting, training session, or event of any kind, you know how great it feels to have everyone as excited and involved as you are. Those are the meetings people talk about later—in a

good way! Those are the meetings that are remembered when people are promoted. Those are the meetings that truly inspire change and productive work relationships. Yet, sadly, most meetings don't garner such rave reviews and results. Instead, what's more commonly "heard on the street" or in the parking lot afterward is that the meeting was a waste of time. People feel that their energy and mental capacity were undermined and underestimated. Admittedly, how many times have you yourself proclaimed, "What a waste of time!" "I already saw those slides." or "She read the slides. Next time, just e-mail me." or "His meetings are always the same . . . B-O-R-I-N-G!" or "I stopped listening about an hour into the training. I was so confused."

Time, energy, and mental capacity are not small considerations. And yet, most presenters avoid involving others when they have the floor. Why is that? What is fearful about facilitation? How can one be more fearless? First, to clarify, let's define some terms:

Facilitator: one who helps to bring about an outcome (for example learning, productivity, or communication) by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision.

Think about the last time a presenter opened the discussion up for everyone, and then made it easy for everyone to participate. That's facilitation. When we see a ballet, enjoy a comedy routine, hear a sixteen-year-old Judy Garland sing "Over the Rainbow," or watch Gene Kelly dance in the rain, we are astonished at how effortlessly they perform. Yet, their actions are the result of painstaking practice, gifted talent, and specific skills that come together to make for classic moments in our lives. Successful facilitation is much the same. The best facilitators look as if they are doing so with no effort, with little movement, and on the spur of the moment. In truth, these facilitators are at the peak of their skill, just as the performers are. But not everyone knows the skills, practices relentlessly, or is able to command competence with such ease.

Kevin had a group of dentists and dental students in a wine bar (yes, we are not kidding!) for a meeting about mentoring for three hours. (The wine came later.) The venue was not perfect, but it did attract dental students, which was the heart of the reason for the meeting. Kevin's goal was

not to teach mentoring, but to have them experience mentoring, to meet one another, to talk, and to have a positive experience with one another. He wanted the younger and more experienced students to build connections with one another.

Therefore, he made a decision early on that connection, not content, was the king of this meeting. He prepared four mini-lecturettes and interspersed them with groups of two and three speaking to one another about the topic at hand.

After the seminar, the host said, “Today I met ten people I did not know . . . that’s what I came for!”

Be aware when connection trumps content, and then get out of the way!

For many presenters, it is much easier (and seemingly safer) to keep talking. When have you felt safe to say what you wanted to say (and what needed to be said) in a meeting? Too often, it feels safer to just say nothing. Nothing said, nothing noted.

Fearless: possessing or displaying courage; able to face and deal with danger or fear without flinching; invulnerable to fear or intimidation; audacious.

Presenters, participants, and leaders who facilitate well are fearless, because they give up the traditional control of an audience or of a team and allow the other to talk, question, and disagree. While this may not seem like a big deal, consider the last time you knew that what you were planning to say would be challenged, disagreed with, or even met with a caustic remark. How did you feel? More to the point, how did you proceed?

Acts of courage: when you let your audience talk to you, when you seek input from your team, when you ask your boss (or your administrative assistant) for advice.

Those who keep talking take the safe route. Those who facilitate the conversation take the courageous route. These courageous ones act—not without risk, of course—and for that, they are “fearless” in our book. “Fearless” facilitation results in “flavorful” responses and outcomes. Diane Kubal, founder of Fulcrum Network, a consultant referral network specializing

in training and organization development, auditions many presenters and trainers before she puts them before her clients. They present a mini-module of their typical approach to a topic. She has noticed that “a lot of training and human resource people are doing the same thing. I’m looking for a flavor other than vanilla.” Fearless facilitation is one important ingredient for adding flavor.

Think back to your last meeting. Did the presenter talk, talk, talk, and then at the very end say, “Any questions?” (Some even add the nonverbal look that says, “I hope not!”) Socrates learned in ancient Greece that asking questions engaged learners. He also learned that it was not always well received by others who preferred to lecture. While it is said that it cost him his life, these days we believe the reverse is true: talk, talk, and more talk makes you indistinguishable from your colleagues and your competition. You become vanilla.

- Dare to be different, even in small ways:
 - Don’t read your slides, ever.
 - Form the audience into discussion groups early.
 - Be simple and direct. Complex directions will not be well understood. Ask them to do one thing at a time.
 - Remove the traditional outline slide and speak to needs instead. Throw some meat out to the audience with a bold statement that will make them respond internally with, “This is worth listening to!”
 - Move around the room early and often. Move physically close to your audience.
- Lighten up your presentations:
 - Don’t be afraid of humor; just never tell jokes.
 - Present in metaphors as well as in a data format.
 - Consider different kinds of snacks and drinks.
 - Consider not using PowerPoint when it is expected.
 - Become the master of teaching with a flip chart or whiteboard.

- Consider yourself a teacher, not a presenter. Model your style after your favorite teacher.
- Really engage with your audience early and often:
 - Meet and greet.
 - Talk with them on breaks.
 - One-on-one during breaks or discussions, ask whether they are “doing OK” frequently. They will often respond with encouragement for you, which will help you stay on track.
- Prepare your audience for something that is extraordinarily “out of the ordinary”:
 - A leap of movement from one way of being to another
 - A creative meeting environment
 - Different kinds of food for meals or breaks
 - Interview a special guest (CEO, trustee, local leader) in front of the group.
- Develop an internal routine, unseen by the audience:
 - Cyndi always walks into the audience no matter what the content or how large the room.
 - Kevin always begins with a story, usually three, to set the tone; then the audience is put into pairs to discuss a relevant question, then groups of three. This is standard for him.
- Be ready to move, fall back, surge, and wait as needed:
 - Move when you see boredom in their eyes.
 - Fall back when they engage willingly with one another.
 - Surge when you feel more passion and energy in the group than you assumed would be there.
 - Therefore, add more of your own, move them less often and with deeper questions.
 - Wait patiently for them to tell, for them to explain, for them to summarize.

- Be conscious of your goals, your time, and your unneeded content:
 - Streamline your content.
 - Teach in “chunks” of material. Adults learn best this way.
- Never ever:
 - Race through your slides because you are short of time. No one is listening anyway. Focus on what experience they need, not what content you need.
 - Finish late. Never. Ever. Never. You will not be forgiven . . . ever!
 - Call someone out who seems not to be involved. He or she will hate you forever.
 - Think that you know more than they do. You might, but it is useless to think so. Form a learning community, not an adoration society.
 - Use a laser pointer . . . ever. It is the mark of a rank amateur, but we will be the only ones to tell you so.

It's About Time!

Facilitation is the skill of the present and of the future. Gone are the days when great presenters lectured for an hour or more. Or in your experience, are they gone? Gone, too, are the days when the presenter's questions were as they were in school—with only one right answer. Really gone? Really? Gone, too, we hope, are the days when the PowerPoint presentation was more powerful than the presenter. How about your last meeting? Perhaps these days should be gone.

If you want to assert leadership with your team and be seen as the expert, then you must learn how to facilitate a presentation (whether to one person or to one hundred people). Make conversation easy and useful, and help others think through necessary solutions rather than restating the problems we all know exist.

So How Do You Begin?

- Know the “real” reason for the meeting and the “real” outcome desired.

- Prepare short mini-lectures that address content but are short enough to allow for more interaction. Adult learning research says that “chunking” material, breaking it down into its component parts, is one of the best ways to convey complex information.
- Assertively put the audience into small groups of two or three, with the following notice: “Please find a partner who is not the one sitting next to you, and have a seat.”
 - This is all it will take to get the room buzzing.
 - Then give them a topic and a time to talk.
 - When finished, somehow recover the data so all hear.
 - Trust that the audience knows more than you do.

Recognize and understand that to facilitate is not easy work. It is easier to prepare and deliver a PowerPoint presentation, beginning with: “I’ll take questions at the end.” It’s far easier to start a discussion when you know the answers. Leaving a voicemail message that spells out precisely what we want without creating a connection or engaging the other is just as easy, also.

The world of entrepreneurial work and the world of organizations are replete with examples of control, fear, authority, and organizational correctness. How often have you stayed quiet at a meeting when you knew your contribution would not be well received? How often do you see junior staff struggling to obey, conform, and do whatever is perceived as right in order to gain favor and to move ahead? How often are mistakes feared and—when they are made—blame is the order of the day, not learning, not alternatives, not reassurance, and certainly not encouragement.

We believe this need not be.

It All Begins with Courage

You can be a change agent in a transformative and still subtle way that allows for you to be a “stealth facilitator” where your impact will be felt, things will be different, people will change, and they will not know how, when, why, or who. They will only know “something is different here.”

It all begins, of course, with courage. The Viennese psychiatrist Alfred Adler once remarked that if he were to give a child any personality characteristic, it would be courage, for with courage, “one can combat life’s greatest problem, which is fear.”

How then is fear manifested where you work? How do you see fear play out in simple day-to-day situations? How does fear manifest itself in you? Do you become quiet? Dig in your heels? Ignore? Fight? Resent?

Do you recognize the fear behind excessive perfectionism or authoritarian demands; in departmental combat or in a deafening silence; in thoughtless conformity or group think? Regardless of fear’s manifestation, the danger is that we can live and work in a situation that constricts rather than elicits from, that concerns itself with transactions rather than transformations, and that forces us to tap down the potential of our people rather than tap the talent that lives within them. As you muster your courage, consider these three keys to begin the work of facilitating “fearlessly” wherever you go.

Three Keys to Facilitate Fearlessly

First, Remember That Your Goal Is to Be of Value to Others

If you see others as merely a path to what you want, it quickly becomes clear that you, not they, are the important ones. This is not a strong way to start.

Have you ever sat in the audience of a presenter who asked questions, seemingly to help the audience understand? Soon it became clear that what mattered was that the audience was supposed to give only the “right” answers. This form of teaching is common in traditional university classrooms and many professional schools. It encourages conformity, promotes discouragement, and often heightens a fear of embarrassment. As the audience offers up ideas, you can spot the presenter using this style because he keeps saying, “Not quite . . . no . . . pretty close. I guess no one knows this!” What becomes clear is that value is defined by what the presenter sees as valuable, not the audience’s experience or feedback.

The fearless facilitator focuses on value as defined by others.

Every person in your audience and on your team wants only one thing: to have his or her problem solved. Even the most loving, caring, other-focused person wants exactly the same thing that the most selfish, narcissistic, obnoxious person on your team wants: the problem solved. This is the true meaning of value. We often hear the term “value proposition” in business today as if we know what will fulfill our customers. What we propose to them is to seek their “yes.” What if, however, we had a “value conversation” with them instead. What if we listened? What if we asked? What if we saw value as they saw it: Can you help me?

Think about your next office conversation. Do you (or your colleague) focus on the other person or do you simply engage in a mutual monologue? Listen closely next time. Does your conversational partner talk about you or about him- or herself? How about you? Who is your focus?

The fearless facilitator paraphrases, summarizes, and empathizes in order to stay close with the topic of the other person.

If you master only three skills, these are the platinum standards. For it is with these seemingly simple skills that you will connect with the other, understand where to go next, and set yourself apart. Each of these skills is often misunderstood and misused. Be careful to understand and to use them with care, but also with courage.

Paraphrasing is not parroting. Parroting is repeating the exact same words that the other person used. This is annoying to them and can be terribly embarrassing to you, simply because most people will loudly proclaim, “Hello! I just said that!”

Paraphrasing is the skill of listening carefully to the other and then, in your own words, summarizing as closely as possible the essence of what the other meant. For example, imagine that a participant declares, “I really learned the most from the bad bosses I had, y’know the ones who looked over your shoulder all the time and wanted things ‘their way or the highway.’” Your paraphrase might be, “So you remember what the bad bosses did and how you learned from that?”

Summarizing is a bit different. When you summarize, you can even announce that you are doing so. (You don't want to do that with paraphrasing; it is bad form and will knock you both off of your flow!) When you summarize, you are taking the content of the other person and arranging it in a way that presents it for his or her approval and perhaps continued presentation of his or her thoughts. In the example with the participant who remembered bad bosses, your summary may sound something like this: "So bad bosses taught you not to micro-manage and not to force people to do things one way only?"

What distinguishes summarizing from paraphrasing is that it is content-rich and is a cooperative activity between you and the other person. Paraphrasing is a process of listening. The metaphor that may explain the difference is to imagine you are walking with the other in the woods and as you walk you are listening to the other describe the journey (paraphrasing); then you both come to a clearing in the woods and stop and pull out a map and a compass (summarizing).

Empathizing adds emotion into the mix. Here you are listening closely and are aware of the feeling the person has as he or she is speaking to you and you add this to the mix of either paraphrasing or summarizing. Again referring to the example of the participant with the bad boss, an empathizing response may be, "Sounds like the discomfort you felt as a result of a bad boss's choices stuck with you."

The point here for the fearless facilitator is that you have to be relentlessly focused on the other person. This is clearly countercultural both in business and in our social circles today. This week pay attention to how many people talk about themselves and how few ask you, care to ask you, care at all about you! When you facilitate, you have to be completely, authentically, totally with the other person. The rewards for doing so are tremendous. Failure to do so means you are too ready to use the hackneyed, pedestrian, Neanderthal phrase, "Any questions?"

Does "group discussion" mean being stuck at a table with the same people for the entire meeting and discussing issues that the presenter poses, rather than ideas dreamed up by the group?

The fearless facilitator eliminates the tables!

You will know you are a grown-up facilitator when you can ask for and move the tables out of the room! Round tables are the bane of good conversation. Move what separates us out of the room in which you really want some good conversation. This is a standard in many meetings: round tables, big tables, huge tables, U-shaped tables, wooden ones with impressive pads, electricity, and speakers coming from underneath . . . yikes, no wonder nobody talks, they are too busy being insulated from one another!

Be prepared for the most common question we hear when we make this request: “Where will I put my stuff?” We reply, “Great question! On the floor, over there, away from us!” Stuff will separate us, too! Fearless facilitators let the audience go “tech naked,” nothing to get in the way of really connecting.

Tables discourage focused conversations, important talks, and deeper meaning. Take away the tables and move people around the room in groups of two or three, sometimes four (no more), and watch what happens to the conversation. The dynamic here is an important one. Do you want your audience to be involved participants or judgmental observers? Think about the last time you were listening to a lecture. Even with the best of presenters, when it is a one-way conversation, our job as the audience is to listen and perhaps take notes, then take some action (or not!) afterward. In a participatory presentation, however, we become active learners. It is our contention that the world of meetings is moving dramatically more toward an involved audience.

Dr. John Vozenilek, founder of the simulation lab at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, speaks of the excitement he feels when he teaches in the simulation lab: “I love the look in [the students’] eyes when they ‘get’ it. This happens more in the lab than in the classroom, much more.” Audience members are often preprogrammed to accept the traditional passive role, but beware, even the friendliest audiences

are judging your presentation. Involved audiences—the ones you allow and encourage to interact with one another and with you—are your fellow presenters and fellow learners.

The fearless facilitator knows that more learning happens in the “lab” environment.

Second, Remember That Others Value Those Who Can Help Them

You do not instinctively value those who are smarter, better, or say they are. You value what you value. You are the value interpreter. This may seem like common sense, but consider how some experts treat you, your teams, or audiences. Some consider themselves the fuel filling up the empty gas tanks . . . us! The mindset you use when presenting is vital, for it determines the technique and strategy.

How you approach others signifies how you regard them, value them, and will impact them. Have you ever felt talked down to? How quickly do you recognize this is happening? This is called vertical communication, with the superior one on top and the inferior one on the bottom. This has been a traditional teaching technique for physicians in residency, where they are grilled by the senior doctor, often feeling less than, humiliated, or worse! (The television show “House,” where the doctor ensures that at all times his residents know he is smarter, is an example of vertical communication.)

The fearless facilitator speaks on a horizontal plane of equality, never on the vertical plane of superiority.

We want you to be strong; not superior. Strength is a quality of the individual; superiority is the myth we believe about ourselves in treating someone else without respect. If you work from your strengths, you will

never have to work to be better than, over another, or diminish anyone, even a rival who is attempting to be superior to you. You may not be able to “kill with kindness,” but you sure can neutralize with it.

Fearless facilitators know that if they can encourage the other to articulate what he or she thinks, feels, and knows, then the facilitator will be in a better position to teach, discuss, and interact with mutual respect. To do this, however, means you give up your natural urge to be on top. You become willing to listen, to really hear, and perhaps to learn yourself. Fearless facilitators who work on the horizontal plane learn something new every day, even about the areas in which they are experts.

At a lecture, have you ever felt you were being “fed” by the person with the “food” and what you thought had no bearing on the encounter? Some lectures are highly entertaining, some less so, and others are boring, tedious, and distancing . . . no matter how smart the lecturer.

Lecturing is easy when you think about it. You don’t even need a class or an audience in front of you. You only require your own ears. This can be seen every day in law, medical, pharmacy, and business schools around the country. You will also find lecturing in schools from first grade through high school. Somehow and somewhere we mis-learned that talking has a teaching effect. Socrates showed us how questions and dialogue are the real stuff of learning, as long as they are done with respect and do not become an opportunity to show our (assumed) superiority.

The fearless facilitator recognizes that lecturing can be the easy way out.

For some, non-participation by the team or audience is a strategy devised to keep us in our place, to obtain a silent approval, to ramrod an initiative through. This is more fearless “force-ification” than fearless facilitation. We see it in business and organizational work daily. It is organizational manipulation at its best *and* at its worst. It is deeply resented by those oppressed by it, but the power of the job, the paycheck, and the promotion allows for its continued use. One client said of his boss, “The guy is really evil, but I

don't have to be around him too much, so I guess” Another said of a particularly ruthless superior, “He was just diagnosed with cancer and for that I feel bad, but at least it means light at the end of the tunnel for the rest of us.” Yikes!

The fearless facilitator is alert to non-participation.

The fearless facilitator, however, leads from personal power, not from the height of superiority. This leader is willing to learn in order to lead, willing to listen in order to be heard, and willing to wait in order to move forward. In short, this leader who is a fearless facilitator knows that mutual respect is at the heart of every human interaction. As human beings, we instantly recognize when we are respected and when we are not. More than being liked, being powerful, being admired, and being right, we want to be respected; we are that type of being. The fearless facilitator not only knows this but acts this way. You can see it practiced in his or her every move.

The fearless facilitator is respectful, first and foremost.

Third, You Help Others Most When Your Focus Is on Them

Ironically, when you focus so clearly on others, this is precisely when you get what you want from your interaction with them. You cannot focus on others in order to receive; you only receive when your focus is on them for them. This is an important distinction—a very important distinction.

It is quite easy and natural to be concerned about ourselves. It is a remarkable event, however, when the focus from the other is on us. Can you remember the last time this happened to you at work? At home? Or anywhere?

Fearless facilitators work to focus on others with attentiveness, questions, and interest.

They do this with one simple technique: they ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or a “no.” Here are some commonly used examples of open-ended questions:

- “How do you see this happening?”
- “What are your thoughts on . . .?”
- “How would you describe . . .?”
- “Why did you select this option?”
- “What is your position on this and why?”
- “What are some of the most important reasons for”
- “How would you train a new hire in this area?”
- “What are your most common challenges?”
- “Why would we want to increase your budget?”
- “What are your team’s strengths?”

As you can see, the options are nearly endless. You can ask question after open question until you find the response you and the group both need.

The fearless facilitator, regardless of technique, always shows intense interest. This facilitator will do so when he or she is not even all that interested. He or she employs one added technique: acting “as if” he or she is interested in order to be interested.

Actors do the same when summoning up strong emotion. They don’t simply cry with real tears by remembering a sad event, they—as one told us recently—“assume the physical position of the sadness and the tears come.” Something as simple as moving toward your audience, moving around with them, and leaning in will help you become a better facilitator. You will even

appear better to the audience! Physical proximity is important because the audience wants the intimacy with you. They want you as much as they want your message.

Fearless facilitators, even in large venues, often get off the “stage” completely or from time to time in order to “meet and greet” the audience.

The famous presenter, Zig Ziglar, was known for his stage presence; he would often move down to the very edge of the stage and stoop down ever so close to his audience. When he did, they knew he was saying something very important to them. Fearless facilitators do the same, not to fake interest, but to become more interested in their audience, to have more perceived value by the audience, and to engender more for them, from them, and with them.

And on a Final and Very Important Note . . .

Fearless facilitation must be fearless for both the presenter and the participants. The presenter must take risks. The participants must not see the risks. The participants must feel safe.

A fearless facilitator’s risk taking must be invisible and unnoticed.

Coach’s Comments

I recently heard Doris Kearns Goodwin speak. She just stands at the podium and tells Lincoln stories, and she’s brilliant! Is facilitation always necessary?

No! If you are an expert with a best-selling book, people are coming to hear you talk about your book. And . . . yes! You will still need to be a savvy facilitator before as you get to know your client’s needs and

after your presentation during the Q&A session. That means working with a microphone handler (if you have one), controlling questions, answering briefly with just the right amount of information, and customizing your answers to the audience as you get a feel for the types of questions they are asking. You may also be inspired with additional comments and questions based on theirs. So facilitation plays a part in every speaking engagement!

Depending on the situation, Doris may even facilitate more if she were with a cadre of other Lincoln experts debating research, approaches, or authenticity of newly discovered manuscripts. Facilitation can be in every engagement. How we use it will be dictated by what we want to accomplish.

