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Facilitating sound decision making throughout Western Australia and beyond!



NEWS TO USE

- Facilitation
- Community engagement
- Building your team
- Effective promotion

Well done!

Yes - well done on making the commitment to improve your skills. This brief newsletter is designed to *give you practical tips* from my own experience to take away and *apply*. Simple as that!

Of course you're extra lucky - not only do you get these great practical tips - you also get to keep the special collectors edition! The first one ever!

So let's get introduced. I've had my own consultancy business for over 11 years. As you've probably guessed, it focuses on delivering value and practical results for clients needing help in the areas listed above.

The majority of my work is across Western Australia with the occasional foray interstate and overseas. In this time I've designed and delivered over 580 workshops and training programs. I figure with this behind me it's time to share some of the experiences I've built up over time.

In my 'other life' I'm a partner in a cafe and catering business with my wife Georgie. This has given me practical experience (sometimes painful) in working with staff, attracting and retaining clients and promoting and marketing a real business.

So you won't be getting academic lecturing or theoretical fluff from me in this newsletter. It'll be pretty real - and not always PC!

What lies within..

- *Facilitation* - Failure requires no preparation
- *Community engagement* - Dealing with tough gigs
- *Building your team* - Stages of group development
- *Effective promotion* - what's your plan?

Got news?

Need answers?..

If you have any special requests for topics you want covered or questions you need answered, just drop me a line:

andrew@andrewhuffer.com.au and we'll make it a learning opportunity for everyone.



Facilitation

Failure requires no preparation!



You may know I'm a big fan of one of Australia's greatest philosophers – The Sandman! 'Failure requires no preparation' is one of his best stories (more on that later).

If you've been in front of a group, you know what pressure is. And if you have to work with them in trying circumstances, you'll be feeling it increase by the minute! Any time we work with a group as a facilitator we're expected to deliver – to hold things together and keep everyone focused. How hard can that be?

Hmmmm...well not always easy. Well – not ever! One thing I have learnt over the years is the importance of thorough preparation prior to facilitating a workshop. In coming newsletters I'll talk about the 'one-percenters' that I utilise. Today, I'll focus on the **client meeting**.

Whatever your role, if you're asked to facilitate a session, it's important to sit down with your client for a few hours as part of the planning phase. I use the word 'client' deliberately. If you're working in a government agency or large organisation and you get this request from a colleague or manager, it's important to treat them as a client. Why?

- It maintains the professionalism and shows facilitation is not just something you can switch on and off at will
- It shows that you're in charge to a degree. Sure, facilitation is about working collaboratively, but ulti-

mately, you need to make decisions about workshop design and process - including when to make changes to the process!

- They've come to you for help, acknowledging your specialised skill. Working with them as a client will further enhance this

Today I met with a client and his senior management team to discuss and map out a team planning workshop. It was a massively valuable use of everyone's time. Doing this helped me to understand:

- The pressure the team was under
- The state of the relationships within the team
- The issues I'll face when facilitating a workshop with their colleagues
- What we really need to focus on during the workshop

Importantly I had to get the team to articulate what the end result of the workshop will be. In this case it's a clear understanding of their strategic plan and how each team member fits in with this. The other 'outcome' will be to provide team members with the chance to 'vent' about the key things causing them grief at work. Once this is out in the open I'll have a process to get them to identify what they'd like to see change and what they can change. Keeping things realistic is important!

The other benefit for me is in building the relationship with the client and in this case, the management team. I'll also meet with the staff attending the workshop beforehand

to ensure everyone is clear on what we're trying to achieve and what they can expect from the day.

So there you go, two hours of time well invested I reckon? What are your thoughts?

PS - for more on The Sandman I recommend buying 'Sandman's advice to the unpopular'

PPS - it includes some great stories for kicking off workshop sessions after a break.

Community Engagement

Dealing with 'tough gigs'

I recently facilitated some local meetings with rural communities interstate. The meetings were about water reform and aimed to give people a better understanding of what was changing, how it will affect them and the chance to ask questions.

A group of 'activists' came from outside of these communities. I'm deliberately labeling them this way as their issues were often unrelated to the objectives of the meetings. They continually tried to dominate proceedings and locals were left frustrated about their involvement being compromised.

Something needed to be done to ensure the locals got their questions answered and the client had a chance of achieving the meeting aims. So here's what I tried...

1. In the introduction I made the ground rules for the meeting very clear, using the ROPES

Respect for others

Openess

Participate

Experience

Share the Air

I made particular emphasis to respect for others and being willing to 'share the air' and give everyone a 'fair go'. This was very useful when things got heated or people started to 'over-participate'. The 'fair go' term was used very deliberately as I believed it was a value that appealed to the 'activist group' – not something they'd be debating.



2. I also ran one meeting (where we had sufficient space) differently by running concurrent sessions – rather than have the whole group assembled (100+ people in a community venue) we ran 2 x concurrent sessions. This gave more time for locals to ask questions during the sessions, coupled with break times in between to do so on an informal basis.

3. I also spent time with the 'activists' to better understand where they were coming from & made sure they still had

Dealing with 'tough gigs' cont.

an equal chance to ask questions & have their say.

From the desk it sounds simple – in a heated, passionate community environment it was challenging – but these approaches helped and the feedback from all sides was positive!

PS Holding the community meetings was a smart and possibly courageous approach from the organization making the changes. I say this because some state agencies are becoming fairly retrograde in their approach to community engagement. Their approach is to release a strategy for public comment and wait. That's it! Imagine the grief the frontline staff are copping for this approach...sigh...

For more information, read my short guide from the **resources** page of my website

Reference material

Here's a small selection of some of the books, guides and newsletters I'm using to improve my knowledge and understanding

Facilitation

Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making. (Sam Kaner and others) (2007) ISBN 13 987 0 7879 8266 9

Community engagement. Beyond public meetings: connecting community engagement with decision-making. Vivien Twford and others (2006). Twford Consulting

Effective promotion

www.petegodfrey.com

What are you using to improve your knowledge?



Building your team

Stages of Group Development

I know I promised not to get too academic...but if you just want to get the basics, this is a good model to help you understand how your team is travelling.

The five stages of group development is based on a model developed by Tuckman and Jensen (1977). It's a simple model and there have been plenty of variations since. The model provides a guide to understand the processes operating within a group at any given time. It helps to explain the different group behaviours over the lifetime of a group – or even over the course of one meeting!

Building on the model, we can begin to identify the role of the team leader at each stage of group development to help guide the group through this process.

The five stages are shown in the table below.

Stage	What's happening
1. Forming	New group, just beginning
2. Storming	Establishing direction & roles within group
3. Norming	Using skills & teamwork
4. Performing	High trust, confident, self-directed
5. Adjourning	Role superceded

In this edition I'll focus on the first two stages, with the following three in the next. This gives you time to observe your team and apply some of the leaders strategies.

Stage 1. Forming

According to Kelsey & Plumb (2004), in the forming stage the group is polite and cautious. They are waiting to get to know each other better before they do anything risky. People are anxious with their new environment and have a desire for acceptance by the group. Many people are checking the 'lie of the land'. They size each other up and think about the personality types in the group and how these compare to themselves. In the forming stage, groups tend to keep things simple and to avoid controversy. Serious topics and feelings are avoided.

Role of the team leader

- Observe the group in action to see who stands out as possible leaders.
- Observe how people interact and the CLICK! styles they exhibit
- Be welcoming and confident and to some degree, directive in helping the group to start to work together and gain focus

Practical approaches

- Plan ways for people to feel more comfortable in and trusting of the group.
- Plan various introductions or warm up exercises, and help the group to set ground-rules.
- Assist the group to clarify its tasks or reason for existence. This can be achieved through identifying the vision (aim) and mission (role) of the group, along with the group values (what is important to them)

Moving on

To grow from this stage to the next members of the group must be prepared to start dealing with some of the more difficult issues, where they may feel uncomfortable and potentially be in conflict with each other.

Stage 2. Storming

The storming stage is characterised by high levels of enthusiasm, energy, excitement, competition and challenge. Kelsey & Plumb have observed that during storming group members are testing the rules and jockeying for power. You will see disagreements, challenges to the process, and emotional responses. Tuckman and Jensen suggested that individuals have to bend and mould their feelings, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs to suit the group organization during this stage. This behaviour requires much energy and can be very uncomfortable for many people.



Group members will be asking themselves:

- Do I feel passionate about the purpose of this program or project?
- Do I like how they are planning to meet my needs & the needs of the project?
- What am I going to do or say that will get my opinion heard?

Effective promotion

Some participants will be experiencing a “fear of exposure” or “fear of failure”. They will need to rely on a clear group structure or ‘terms of engagement’ as identified in the forming stage. Some conflicts may not arise surface as group issues, but still be there under the surface. Conflict may also arise regarding the roles of leadership, power, and authority within the group. Because of the discomfort generated during this stage, some members may remain completely silent while others attempt to dominate.

Role of the team leader

- Build on the work from the forming stage to clarify tasks, help assign roles and keep disagreements from becoming personal conflicts.
- Have a calming influence, as well as enforcing the ground rules.

Practical approaches

- Set and maintain a positive tone for the group and look to include time for fun or social activities
- Encourage input

Moving on

In order to progress to the next stage, group members must move from a “testing and proving” mentality to a problem-solving mentality. The most important trait in helping groups to move on to the next stage is the ability to listen and clarify.

What’s your plan?

You may know I’m helping to organise the **Australasian Facilitation Conference**. In fact I’ve taken on the role of convenor – an exciting challenge, for sure! Now most people would groan about this task, and it does have its ‘moments!’

One thing that excites me about the conference is the chance to further test and refine my promotion skills. I’m learning plenty along the way – believe me!

A measure of success will be the



number of delegates attending (hint – there’s still time for you to **register**). So let’s take a look at what I’ve been doing to attract attention for the conference and get people excited about it.

Firstly a bit of background. The conferences are put on by the Australasian Facilitators Network. This is a ‘self-organising’ group of people with a passion for facilitation. There is roughly 900 members across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

In addition to the annual conference each state has a chapter that meets regularly. There's also an email discussion group.

Most of the conferences have been attended primarily by AFN members, which makes sense. So that's who the promotion has been targeted at. In recent conferences we've seen fewer local people attend, which raised some concerns for me. I felt strongly that for the 2011 conference we needed to actively seek out people from outside the AFN who are using facilitation in their workplace, but don't necessarily use the term facilitation for it.

Sounds easy hey? Here's the approach so far:

The Who. To get off and running I drew up a list of 'the who.' (Not the band). Who are the people using facilitation skills and where will I find them.

Pain. Then I thought about what problems they'd be having in trying to work with groups, teams and communities in a facilitation role.

Relief. Identifying how attending the conference would relieve their 'pain' and address their 'problems' was the next biggie. Classic motivation theory says people only act when there's a benefit to be gained or a loss to be minimised.

How. The next challenge was how to get to them. I've focused on the 'low-hanging fruit' first, using electronic and social media. This includes the conference website, a **Linked-In** page, **Twitter** and **Facebook**. Of course, using the AFN email forum has been a key element too. From here we need to use print media (people still get letters) which will involve a direct letter, postcard and brochure campaign. We're also using partners to get the message out to their clients.

An example is IPAA WA which has a emailing list of 5000+ people working in all levels of government in WA.

There's the outline. You can have a peek at how these media are being used by clicking the links and checking them out for yourself.

What can you do with this? Look at the process I've used and replicate it. Just remember four things:

- The Who
- Their pain
- Relief you offer
- How to get to them

In the next newsletter I'll go a bit more in depth on how to appeal to your target audience

PS – follow this **link** to subscribe to the AFN online enews forum.

Next edition

- The basics of strategic planning
- More on group development
- Appealing to your target audience

Your requests

Remember, if you have specific questions, hit me with them via **email** or via my **website**.

And if somehow, you're not already a newsletter subscriber, become one by going to www.andrewhuffer.com.au