

Module 12, Lesson 4 Handout:

How to be a Good Group Leader & How to Manage Good Flow

Some people naturally love public speaking and feel totally confident getting up in front of a group, but there's more to being a group leader than just taking over the mic. There are some basic qualities you'll want to master, plus tips and tricks for running groups that are structured and flow seamlessly. Let's run through some tips for how to be a fantastic group leader and then get into how to put that into practice.

How to Be a Fantastic Group Leader

- **Actively listen and observe.** The ability to be quiet, hear the participant out and notice nuances is a true skill. Avoid the urge to interrupt. Listen to their comments, address any questions they bring up and make a mental note of what this person had to say in case they want to speak with you after the group.
- **Show respect and empathy.** Maybe this seems like an obvious thing to say, but being respectful and empathetic takes skill and practice. You won't agree with or relate to everything someone has to say, but it's still important to hear them out and validate their opinions and feelings.
- **Be honest and fair.** Be mindful to give all participants equal floor time and leave enough time at the end for questions so everyone has a chance to speak if they want.
- **Be accessible.** Allow for relationship building and trust. Include an activity or time for networking at the end of the group.
- **Ask probing questions.** Take the conversation to a deeper level. Encourage participants to *actually* participate, making sure they feel comfortable speaking their minds and talking about the tough stuff.
- **Think quickly.** Intervene with quick redirection and adapt when things go in a direction that is unexpected. For this, you need to come prepared and feel totally comfortable with the material you're speaking on. Be proactive by researching related topics that you anticipate might come up.

- **Be assertive.** This demonstrates confidence and offers you the opportunity to control situations so participants don't take the group down an unintended path. Allow others to speak their minds, but know when you need to get back on track and politely take over.
- **Be flexible.** If things don't go as planned, still deliver an amazing group experience.
- **Use humor.** People need a little levity. You don't have to be a comedian, you just have to keep the energy light and upbeat.
- **Know a variety of techniques.** Lots of people learn in lots of ways, so keep it a little unpredictable! Incorporate images, hands-on experiences, discussion time, videos, etc. You don't need to have a crazy-elaborate show, but try to include a few different things assuming you'll have a mix of learners in the room.
- **Energize the group.** If you are positive, bright and enthusiastic, there is a much stronger likelihood your group will be too.

Tips for Running Lessons that Flow and Encouraging Participation

First things first, start your meetings on time (as much as humanly possible) and have a plan in place for how to handle latecomers. Try to begin each lesson in the same way. For example, you could have everyone introduce themselves and go over the agenda, or maybe start with something that is relevant to your group that happened in the news that day. This kicks off the group discussion in a friendly way.

During your lesson, don't go overboard with info. Encourage participation with these strategies:

- **Paraphrase.** Use "what I hear you're saying" or "if I'm understanding you" to highlight important points that may need clarification among your participants. It also helps participants feel validated and understood.
- **Draw people out.** Use phrases like "how so?" and "can you go further with that idea" to have someone clarify their own ideas that may be unclear and you may get some good "a-ha!" moments.

- **Stack away.** Stacking is a good way to organize your group members who are eager to share and to get those who are more hesitant to share in the queue. Say “Let’s hear first from Angie, then let’s give Marissa the floor...”
- **Track.** This may mean you take some notes, but if you can connect various themes throughout the group, you can really make strong connections. “We started today talking about Marissa’s point with the holidays and eating consistently when traveling and I’m really liking how Angie built on that with her suggestions for planning ahead and stopping at a supermarket before checking in at the hotel.”
- **Be Encouraging.** Put yourselves out there by asking if the discussion is raising questions, especially if there are people who haven’t participated. Something like “Does this discussion raise any questions for anyone?”
- **Balance is key.** Take note if people are preaching to the choir and not all viewpoints are being represented. “We’ve heard a lot about watching the carbs to deal with the holidays today -- does anyone have a different strategy we might want to discuss?”
- **Make space.** If you see a participant is hesitant or unable to break in, invite him or her in by asking “Steven, is there something you wanted to add?”
- **Embrace differences as just that.** If your group is diverse, you may get some really radically different opinions. And that’s a good thing. Acknowledge it. “I’m hearing we have lots of different opinions here. Marissa is going to try to make it from Thanksgiving to New Years Eve with Intermittent Fasting, Angie says Carb Counting is going to be her approach and Ilene is sticking to her go-to usual healthy ways.”

Okay, so maybe you’re someone who’d rather do just about anything than speak in front of a group. That doesn’t mean you can’t be a fantastic group leader and run successful health workshops! This skill gets easier the more you do it, so the first step is just getting out and jumping in. Groups are an amazing way to reach a lot of people at once and give them an opportunity to connect with one another, so get out there and make it happen.