



Keyword: Process Improvement

Seven Tips for Facilitating Process Improvement Efforts

by Kevin Eikenberry

This is a big topic. And as such this Bonus Byte is designed to give you some high level tips to help you be a more effective facilitator of any process improvement effort. The underlying philosophy of these steps is:

No one person (especially you) has all the answers. A highly effective process improvement process for any substantive process requires the participation and engagement of others.

It is your job as a leader, and in this case a facilitator, to create a process and environment that allows participation and engagement to occur. Here are seven steps to help you do that.

The Seven Tips

- **Have a model.** Chances are your organization supports or uses a specific process improvement model or methodology. If so, use it. If not, do some research and find one to use. The process of process improvement will be much easier and successful if you have a roadmap. Remember that it is less important which process you use (unless you have a standard in your organization) than that you use one. Don't have a meeting without a model!
- **Follow and teach the model.** The model won't be of any use if you don't follow it! Use your methodology and trust the process. Additionally, if members of the process improvement team don't know the methodology, you have an opportunity to teach it and the tools you are using *as you are using them*. Don't lose track of the fact that your primary goal is to improve the process, but remember that you have a golden learning opportunity to teach the process as they are doing the process.
- **Engage the group.** Remember that *people don't argue with their own data*. Let the group talk, discuss and share their ideas. You may have ideas to share, but let the group talk first. If they come up with some ideas you had, great! If you have something to add that's fine. You can step out of your facilitator role near the end of the conversation to add your ideas. Your goal is to engage the group and one of the best ways to do that is to keep your opinions to yourself - at least in the beginning of the conversation. Here's a bonus tip: If you are having trouble getting the conversation going, use questions, rather than inserting your ideas.
- **Do the steps.** Do them all. Don't just start with your methodology until it gets difficult or people balk at the rigor or tools you are using. Use your chosen methodology all the way through.
- **Stay out of the vacuum.** Other people outside the specific team that is working on the process improvement likely have input or ideas. Talk with customers and suppliers of the process. Get input from people not on the team. Getting those additional inputs and perspectives will give you a better final result - and one that will more likely be accepted by everyone involved.
- **Implement with a plan.** Once you have determined what improvements to make to the process, have an implementation plan. This plan should include timelines and when and who to communicate with. Recognize that any process improvement is a change and therefore requires you consider this plan to be a change plan too.



Seven Tips for Facilitating Process Improvement Efforts (continued)

- **Standardize and follow-up.** This is the final step and is often forgotten. Once you have identified an improvement and tried it, often it is assumed that the project is completed. Too often once people have tried it, without reinforcement and measures to “lock in” these improvements, people will begin to slide back to the old habits and ways of doing things. When this happens the result is worse than not having improved the process at all – you have wasted the time to identify and implement the change and allowed cynicism to seep into people’s minds as well. Once you have improved a process, make sure you standardize it!

These seven tips will help you as you lead and/or facilitate any process improvement!



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