

Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time

**Excerpt of Chapter 12:
Remarkable Leaders Value
Collaboration and Teamwork**

Your Now Steps

Consider the tips above and do the following:

1. Identify which of the suggestions presented you could most benefit from implementing.
2. Make notes in your journal as to how you can improve in this area.
3. Take those actions at your next team meeting, if not sooner.



Remarkable leaders don't lead just organizations or individuals; they lead teams.

The Leader as a Facilitator

One of the complaints I hear about organizations using many teams is that with teams come meetings; the more teams, the more meetings—and meetings don't always have the best reputation. According to Tom Terez in research cited in his book, *Twenty-Two Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace* (2002), meeting goers spend an average of nine hours per week in meetings, and nearly all attendees report that at least 20 percent of that time is unproductive. That's an average of at least 1.8 hours of unproductive time per employee per week.

How many employees do you lead? Multiply that number by 1.8, and then multiply that result by 50 weeks (assuming two weeks of vacation). How many total hours did you come up with? Now ask yourself how many ways you could put those hours to better use than to have people be unproductive in meetings. I'm guessing you can come up with a long list.

More collaboration and more teams clearly means more meetings, which then means that it's a critical productivity point to make meetings more productive and effective. As the leader, that is your responsibility. There are few things you can do to improve the productivity of your team more than learning how to facilitate those meetings more successfully.

Your role as facilitator is to make it easier for the group to progress toward its goals. Throughout this book, we have examined the leader's role of removing obstacles and providing resources to people. These efforts certainly make things easier for a group too, but there is a difference.

Leader Versus Facilitator

In a meeting, the leader is concerned about the content of the meeting; he or she is constantly thinking about what is being said, if ideas being discussed can be achieved, if they fit into the budget, and the implications of these ideas or actions across the organization or on other projects.

A true facilitator isn't concerned with these questions at all. Rather, the facilitator is concerned with the process of the meeting; he or she is constantly thinking about what is happening and how it works toward the successful achievement of the meeting's desired outcomes. The facilitator is also thinking about the group dynamics, how to get everyone to participate, and how to help the group clarify its problem.

The leader wants action items that can be accomplished given the current constraints of the organization (content). The facilitator makes sure the group forms action items and that each one is assigned (process). The leader cares about the desired outcomes in terms of the actual decisions (content). The facilitator is concerned only that decisions are reached (process). This division is quite clear and extremely helpful when there are two different people playing these roles. However, as a team leader, you often will be the one facilitating the meeting too, so you must balance these two roles.

Notice that I said you must balance these two roles, not pick one. If you put the facilitator hat on and never lead, the team might flounder looking for guidance. And if you keep your leader hat on entirely (assuming no one else is playing the facilitator role), the meeting may be less productive and more like thousands of other meetings team members have attended in the past.

To be most effective, even in a highly developed team, meetings need a facilitator. The facilitator does not have to be the leader (it could be an outside person or another team member with the necessary skills and experience). The leader is then responsible for making sure this role is covered, and in many cases, it will be the leader.

To become a remarkable leader, you must develop facilitation skills.

The Skills of a Great Leader-Facilitator

Here is a list of skills that will get you started on your path toward facilitation excellence. This list isn't complete, but it is focused on the specific skills that are most important if you are leading and facilitating:

- *Recognize both roles.* Because you are balancing the roles of leader and facilitator, you must understand that they are two distinct roles

and treat them as such. Let the group know you will be playing both roles. Generally you will be more effective when you stay in the facilitator role except when your leader role is needed. This gives more process ownership to the rest of the group and makes the meeting more collaborative. When your input is needed as a leader, you state to the group that you are changing roles and now acting as the leader—and when that role is no longer required, just as clearly return to the facilitator role.

- *Listen.* We have examined the importance of listening to building relationships, developing others, championing change, and more. This skill is as important in your facilitator role as in your leader role.
- *Provide a process structure.* Facilitators need to know ways to get everyone involved in a conversation, they need to know a variety of ways to help the group generate more ideas, and they need to know the problem-solving process. When dealing with the process dimension, the best leader-facilitators have a bag of process tools that they can use when the time is right.
- *Provide process suggestions and feedback.* Facilitators must help a team in the midst of its group process to get unstuck, get back on track, and move past a tough issue. Facilitators are able to intervene gently to help these changes occur without inserting themselves into the process. This is a particularly challenging place for the leader. Balancing your roles in these situations, and not reverting to “here’s how we are going to do it because I’m the leader,” is important if your goal is to keep the group engaged and actively participating in the process.
- *Observe without judgment.* Facilitators exist not to judge but to make things easier. Effective leader-facilitators are able to make observations and tell the group what they see without turning the comment into feedback or correction. By remaining in a process dimension, they help a team guide itself through difficulties and challenges while maintaining its sense of ownership.
- *Keep quiet.* The best facilitators make meetings better without really being noticed; they aim for the lightest possible touch. They know that they have done their best work when the meeting was successful but no one can really say what the facilitator “did.”

Other Keys to Improving Your Meetings

While the ideas that follow are not completely in the realm of the facilitator role, three things are the most important attributes of any