



International Association of Facilitators
The Art and Mastery of Facilitation – Worlds of Change
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
April 27 – 30, 2000



World of Social Change

FACILITATING YOUTH AND YOUNG AMERICAN ADULTS: UNIQUE NEEDS,
INNOVATIVE METHODS

David Alan Brown
Power In You Programming, Inc.
5245 Cornelius Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46208
317.259.1248
317.259.1249 (fax)
dab@powerinyou.com
<http://www.powerinyou.com>

Abstract

Young people are among the most powerful on Earth. They possess the light, vision, insight and drive inherent in us all. They also have the time, energy, rectitude and enthusiasm that is beyond some, “more experienced” adults. Unleashing this amazing power is rewarding for the group and the facilitator while it benefits our world. In this workshop, you will learn many of the basics for understanding and effectively facilitating this remarkable group of proactive citizens.

Major factors that contribute to successful youth mentoring and facilitation covered and techniques are provided to help individuals further understand how to empathize with the youth mind-set while creating a vibrant understanding of the tools and worth that young people can actualize to make great change in their world. The interaction of peer and adult to youth



partnerships is vital to success and here, innovative techniques for facilitating these relationships will be offered. Further, facilitators must often become advocates for the abilities and goals of a younger audience. Why this is, and how to counteract a bias that inhibits young people is sure to be an outcome of this session.

Understanding the Youth Audience

What's more embarrassing than an adult trying to be "cool" in front of a teen audience? You can purchase a copy of "Seventeen" magazine and pour over it, listen to the local teen radio station for a week and watch six hours of "Dawson's Creek" until you finally realize that James Vanderbeek is a person, not a rare bird. But, until you are honest, straightforward, knowledgeable and caring you will not score points with a youth audience.

Our first project when entering the facilitation of a young audience is to recapture some of our own childhood. Individuals who are not able to be young at heart should not attempt to facilitate youth or young adults. Individuals who feel they can act young are especially discouraged to try. Being young at heart means remembering and feeling what your own teen experience was in order to begin to empathize with the youth of today. And yet this is not enough, for your you was vastly different than what young people face today. Time magazine published the results of surveys in which teachers were asked what the biggest discipline concerns in schools were. In 1950, the list included truancy, overdue library books and talking in class. In 1990, the top concerns were rape, vandalism and murder. The difference in culture is vast but the feelings are often the same. Your thrill at accomplishing community service can still be the same for a young person today, but understanding that the motivation and reward is likely to be different is vital to success. Take time to explore and understand what being young means to you. Having a terrible teen experience doesn't mean that you can't work with teens, but

it does mean that any issue that still affects your life needs to be fully understood. Conversely, remembering your Sorority years as the best party of your life doesn't mean that you will instantly bond with young adults at their next party but it does mean that you will have a natural enthusiasm for that age group. The most important tool you have for impacting young adults is your truth and confidence mixed with a generous portion of genuine care for the life of the individual you are facilitating. With any situation involving young adults, misdirection, deceit, unfairness and ego are instant door closers.

Empowering Young People for Personal Growth

Every interaction with a young audience is an opportunity to enhance our world. Imagine where our society would be if stress management was a curriculum course in High School. Anger management is used by professionals as a discipline tool in our schools, but imagine if "emotional intelligence" was as vital as an SAT score for advancement. Athletics are touted only as competition and glory and gym/health classes are an afterthought, but imagine if nutrition, holism and balance were the achievement being rewarded.

Encouraging young people to assess things like health, spirituality and community is integral to creating an organization of vibrant, productive student leaders, but often challenges a facilitator to be creative and strong. Admitting that these are not often the qualities that are traditionally rewarded by our society is an important first step. Individuals of all ages are aware that the perceived means of advancement in this society rarely come to those embrace such holistic issues. One technique for counteracting this is external and includes the discussion of leaders who create great change through enlightened thinking. The CEO of Southwest Airlines regularly tours his facilities and gives out buttons, smiles and hugs. Companies who provide a quiet room for meditation or naps see compounding increases in their productivity.



The second and more effective way to teach this understanding is by instilling the value of these holistic components in a young person's life. The life work of Victor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, is one of helping individuals understand that "it does not matter what we expect of life, but rather what life expects of us". Nelson Mandella espouses that "it does no good for us to diminish ourselves in order to make another feel better", but that we must strive to be everything we can be at all times. Young people have an exceptional sense of global, community and environmental empathy and are anxious to be reminded that this is worthy. Indeed, they are in the lone time our society teaches, even empathizes, the values of Thoreau, activism and the arts. Creating a bridge between this developmental time in life and "adulthood" when so many educated people put these ideals aside for safety and monetary reward is paramount the healing of our world.

Just like any other audience, the discussion of holistic issues can be fraught with pitfalls and hidden traps. Avoid these by consistently offering alternatives and "outs". A participant should always have the option of skipping an activity and should never be made to feel that such an action is inappropriate. Helping teens participate in stress management teaches them a practical tool, while allowing them to assess their own needs and utilize it when they feel it is necessary. Allowing young people the power of discernment in all your work creates a trust and respect that is sure to lead to successful partnerships.

Proven Practical Techniques for Facilitating Youth and Young Adults

Do you have to be funny? While a sense of humor and a quick wit are always valuable when being a facilitator, performing or doing a stand-up routine for students is difficult to pull off. Use this technique only if it is your standard operating procedure when facilitating groups.

And, even then, be prepared for material that has always been sure-fire with an adult audience to fall short with young people.

As previously mentioned, introductions can almost always be an opportunity for you to take an assessment of the participants while allowing them to have fun and realize that this process isn't entirely about boring learning and goal setting. Start simple and without much risk. Name Bingo (where one fills in a grid of characteristics by having to find someone who fits the bill) or Twin Finding (matching pairs and not letting the partnership end until they find a number of things in common) are good start ups. A game like "I Like People Who" (kind of like musical chairs but with like interests as the trigger) is more active and should come later in the process. Always be aware of your groups physical space, ability and need. If the group is energetic and needs to move around, by all means shift your agenda and put the active game ahead of the mental one. Similarly, a more mental activity pulled out of your hat at the right moment can transition an active group to a serious activity.

In virtually every youth facilitation circumstance there are basic discussion guidelines that have to be set. This often comes across as being fairly stodgy and rule-like. The three basics are this: No put-downs, respect to others who are speaking and understood confidentiality. (Understood confidentiality means that everyone agrees not to "gossip" about anything that goes on during the session. But, it is very important that you know your legal and ethical responsibility to report abuse of self or others, substance abuse or endangerment. Tell the group of your obligation immediately, during this rules discussion.) Be sure to remind everyone that there is a time schedule for the day, and sticking to this means that there is likely to be some unfinished business at times. Participants are sure to "slip" on these rules once in awhile, have the group figure out a fun way to pay retribution.



Beware the likely conversation stoppers: the Dominator, the Pessimist & the Cheater. A participant of any age can dominate a conversation or activity. Making up a rule in the middle of a role play (“Okay, just for a challenge, Mary won’t be able to talk for the rest of the game”) gets the point across pretty clearly. In discussion it can be more difficult, but the use of a “talking stick” or taking turns to ask everyone to participate can ensure equal interaction. Pessimists are idea and momentum killers that are often dealt with by peer interaction amongst the group. Groups that are unprepared or improperly facilitated may not be able to overcome a dominate pessimist, however. Be ready with questions like “What has been your experience in the past?” because having to rely on facts almost always shuts down a pessimist. Or try “How would you best go about it?” and see if this person is wanting to take on a challenge or just being a nay-sayer. Having a structured goal system means that you can turn to a pessimist and ask “Considering that we still have this goal to be reached, what do you suggest?” (see below). And, finally, a cheater is someone in your group who just isn’t able to accomplish the full aspect of the task without cutting corners or falling short. Be prepared to be frustrated by this approach to team work, but put away your own feelings and let the group counteract the cheater. Quality leadership and empowered young people will not put up with shoddy work for long.

Lack of an effective organizational structure is most common reason I see groups stall, fail or get frustrated. More often than not, I find that organizations have skipped the vital foundations of group goal setting and are left with direction less projects as their focus for being. If a project doesn’t go well or fails, the group becomes frustrated and angry, often times disbanding altogether. This is avoided by helping your group establish a foundation, starting with a Purpose. This broad, grandiose reason for existence is the same in the corporate, private or group setting: Why are you doing what you are doing? A purpose statement includes the

most fundamental definition of this question, tied in with who is going to do it and where they are based. “What are we going to do” enters into the picture until the next element: The Objectives. These mission statements are clear cut answers to the issue at hand. They include thoughtful and discerned alternatives that create change. Objectives will often include measurable standards of improvement, but they are still broad. Believe it or not, only now, in the third tier, does the question “How?” come into play. The Goals are clear, concise action elements that directly effect the proposed Objectives. For example: If I have established a group because there is too much teen violence in the world, one objective might be to provide education in anger management. Therefore, a goal would be to give classes that would be required by teens who have been in trouble at school. If the school fails to cooperate or no students show up at the class or the teacher is unable to follow through with the class, the organization still thrives for it can find a new goal to fulfill the objective (education) because the objective is still vital to the fulfillment of the purpose end violence). Until violence is completely eradicated, the group will always exist, even if objectives need to be reworked (and they should be reviewed annually).

Overcoming Community Bias

Ageism is a prevalent a bias in our society as race or gender. By means of setting up an industrialized society, we have created a system that creates specific and sometimes confining roles based on age. Youth are among those who are typecast into certain behaviors and emotions because of age. As previously discussed, the depth of emotion that an individual brings to the idea of “youth” or “teenager” or “college student” can be the defining factor in the success of this facilitation group. I have certainly encountered faculty advisors and dedicated volunteers who bring buckets of bias to their work and have watched as young people are stifled and bored.



A huge factor in the success of youth facilitation is the ability of the facilitator to let go of the outcome of the process. This is not to say that a facilitator need expect failure or even diversion. Nor would a solid leader allow the purpose or objectives of a group be compromised. And yet, a facilitator who is unable to allow the group itself to create viable objectives and goals within the world that they indeed inhabit is using improper motivation to do the work. In all our lives, we can be certain that the processes of group dynamics, working in public policy, individual relationships and service to others are the true educational elements of living. Bearing this in mind and always looking to the established purpose of a group, the adult facilitator must be prepared to step away from the operations of a youth group and allow the inherent dynamic to play out. In few other situations is the need for Servant Leadership more pressing.

When placing such responsibility on the shoulders of youth, everyone must be prepared for an occasional failure. Projects, Goals and Objectives can not always come to pass according to the most vital images created in planning. An outstanding facilitator is able to, first, assess and actualize the feelings being expressed by the participants. There should never be a downplaying of the true emotions that come about when failures occur and the process of feeling and working through these emotions is a vital lesson to be taught to youth. Second, facilitators must be able to properly communicate the lessons and insights that can be gained from every activity whether deemed successful or not. Without being condescending or corny, the ability of a facilitator to teach, even in perceived failure, is the difference that can make for consistent excellence.

Finally, don't underestimate the value of celebration by the members of your group. Work some sort of reward into the action plan of virtually every major project you undertake and be sure that the leaders of the group you are facilitating are keenly aware of the importance of

recognition, gratitude and merit. The members of a youth group, especially one that is public service oriented will continue to be vibrant, excellent participants when they are consistently rewarded. Your reward comes each time you understand that enormous impact you have had on our world by creating another productive energetic leader who will carry your lessons to the world he or she is healing.

Biography: David Alan Brown

David Alan Brown has taken his message of empowerment across the country and reached thousands of students and adults. His programs are based upon his understanding that young people are the nation's best resource and that they can accomplish anything they put their minds to. That philosophy has created a professional company that works to develop "The Power In Youth" in many areas. Besides motivational speaking, DABco specializes in consulting and program development for the enhancement of students. His vast experience in substance abuse prevention has afforded him opportunity to work in a wide variety of settings, from one-on-one family support to school-system-wide educational programs.