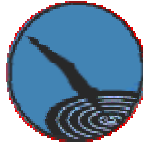




International Association of Facilitators
The Art and Mastery of Facilitation – Worlds of Change
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
April 27 – 30, 2000



World of Personal Spirit

THE HEART, ART, AND SOUL OF FACILITATION

Carol-Ann Hamilton
Spirit Unlimited
2764 Hammond Road
Mississauga, Ontario, L5K 2M3, Canada
Phone: (905) 822-2503
Email: spirit-unlimited@home.com

Abstract

As we enter the 21st Century, facilitators everywhere experience a particularly auspicious opportunity to contribute not only to the development of our profession, but also to the evolution of humanity. We share a tremendous privilege - to usher in, promote, and expedite transformation of the very nature of work itself. With such awesome business and personal responsibilities ahead of us, the “heart”, techniques (art), and soul we bring forth through facilitation practices become even more critical.

Through this article, I hope to share my experiences and suggestions for reclaiming Who You Really Are, for restoring energy and passion to individuals and groups, and for unleashing Spirit and Purposefulness into your workplaces. “The Heart of Facilitation” deals with personal mastery, authenticity, and our ‘way of being’ as facilitators. In “The Art of Facilitation”, we delve into holding groups’ energy, drawing out meaning, and applying techniques to create engagement. The section called “The Soul of Facilitation” reviews spirituality-in-business trends



and elaborates the need to practice ‘extreme self-care’, given the challenges we face as ‘prophets in their own lands’.

If you are interested in further information about the contents of this article, or about my work as a coach-facilitator, I am more than pleased to hear from you at any time.

The Heart of Facilitation

“Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart to give yourself to it.”
(Buddha)

According to Eastern science, life energy circulates through channels that merge at seven energy centers along the spine, called “chakras”, a Sanskrit word meaning “wheels”. The fourth chakra, located in the heart, expands when we love others as we love ourselves. The ‘heart’ of facilitation, therefore, is about working with our inner being to create environments that help others open their own hearts. Facilitators are called to transform themselves and embrace their authenticity in order to offer clarity, mindfulness, and their Higher Selves to others.

Personal Mastery

Science has now proven that thoughts create physical reality. Given we have about forty-five thousand thoughts a day, it would be interesting to speculate as to whether more are negative or positive. Since self-talk is constant, we can immediately discern potential impacts on others if facilitators are not ‘conscious’. Indeed, we cannot learn new ways of being – or teach them to others – without first becoming aware of our own unresolved emotions. In turn, shifting our thoughts and interactions toward the positive results in experiencing ever-deeper levels of satisfaction that translate to others.

As such, personal transformation precedes organizational. In soul work, congruence is vital; facilitators must strive to ‘walk their talk’. We need to examine self-imposed restrictions,

and release these old spirit-deadening ways of working or living. Change begins with us, and it means ‘turning the mirror’ on ourselves first. To live with meaning and purpose, facilitators know they need to journey into the ‘dark night of the soul’ in order to emerge fully alive.

We all know the axiom, “the teacher teaches what the teacher needs to know”. For those who come to this kind of work, our purpose frequently has something to do with learning how to love more unconditionally, developing characteristics like faith and courage, or aiding others’ spiritual development. By embracing these twin principles of teaching and learning, we increase groups’ capacity for wisdom.

Here are some actions to encourage personal mastery:

- Replace negative outlooks and belief systems with optimism, love, acceptance, kindness and peace
- Regularly spend time examining your behavior; develop total honesty with yourself
- Observe a lot; devote keen attention to what you are thinking and feeling

Your Authentic Self

We already are what we seek; these qualities are part of us, not separate. Our essence consists of eternal possibility, creativity, and joy. Life is about being who we are, not trying to become it. In fact, our life journeys are about uncovering and reclaiming ‘Who We Really Are’.

Authenticity, then, is about offering our unique gifts and talents to others, and encouraging them to do the same. As we commit to unveiling and being our real selves, facilitators inspire individuals and groups to undergo their own creative emergence. Authenticity is spiritual electricity. If even one person increases his or her creative voltage, everyone is assisted to see more clearly and with greater vision. As we risk more loving candor, profound and powerful energy cascades through workplaces.



Mind you, facilitators' paths are often not easy - like Scott Peck's 'road less traveled'. Authenticity is also about upsetting the status quo and breaking rules that no longer make sense. Based on their fundamental commitments, facilitators are dedicated to truth telling, including conveying messages others don't want to hear. Organizationally, this means stating 'the emperor wears no clothes'. Interpersonally, it involves expressing themselves fully and honestly in all relationships. Facilitators must be willing not to 'step over the garbage', to listen to their hearts and take risks.

It takes enormous courage to stand firm in your opinions when you are going 'against the tide'. It can be lonely. Yet, you will find it increasingly necessary to be authentic in how you view things, forceful and clear in communicating what you see.

Consider these points to determine how authentic you are:

- To what extent do you live all aspects of your life according to your inner truth?
- How much time do you spend listening to your soul? (e.g., passions, enjoyments, fears, desire for learning)
- How would you describe your authentic self? (e.g., values, needs, motivations, etc.)

Your "Being-ness"

In North America, hurry up sickness that characterizes daily life has become so prevalent as to be unquestioned. It is about buying into myths about continuously rising productivity curves and getting rewarded for super-human syndrome. As if stuck on treadmills, people get trapped in constant doing and forget we are spiritual beings having a 'human experience'.

Faced with overwhelming pressures, facilitators especially risk falling into these dysfunctional states. Once we realize energy flows from us, and is felt by others (like signals or waves from radio or television stations), we notice important implications for our 'way of being'.

If actions generate energy that returns to us in equal measure, then choices produce cause-and-effect; we will either give (and receive) positive presence or emotional unavailability.

As such, we need to right imbalances between being (receptive, feminine energy) and doing (active, male energy). When properly proportioned, these energy forces offer dynamism to individuals and groups. When unaligned, we lose touch with our core strengths and life's purpose; work becomes an albatross.

Ask yourself these questions about your 'way of being':

- Is my 'being' fueled by peacefulness and inspiration, or do I spend more time 'doing' (creating stress and resentment)?
- As a facilitator, am I 'in the flow' when I work with others, or do I exert force or willpower to drive my own agenda?
- What kind of energy do you experience coming from individuals and groups you work with?

The Art of Facilitation

“Most new discoveries are suddenly-seen things that were always there.”

(Suzanne K. Langer)

The 'art' of facilitation is about applying reflective and interactive tools and techniques from business, psychology, arts, and spiritual disciplines. By holding groups' energy, drawing out meaning, and creating engagement, we invite others to look with 'new eyes' at their lives. Inquiry and curiosity lead to introspection, exploration, and discovery. Through powerful questions, facilitators engage not just the 'head' but also heart and soul. Their guiding premise is that people have all answers within.



Holding Group Energy

Facilitators need to be like vessels - containers for whatever demands to be aired before moving into the ‘agenda’. Personal experience with this principle occurred recently when facilitating administrative staff through their company’s cultural transformation. Having planned to combine new content with ample venting opportunities, I must nonetheless confess to being bowled over by how much pent-up emotion showed up both individually and collectively. My self-aware, sensitive client and I proved once again that simply getting people together constitutes the true intervention.

To hold group energy, facilitators must look within for guidance. It is about trusting intuition, using creative impulses, and participating from our right brain. It is about listening to what your soul wants you to know and letting your mission become all it needs to be. It is about channeling universal energy and surrendering your will to something greater. Yielding to intuition over rational, logical analysis allows us to ascertain deeper emotional currents, help people more effectively process their lives, and give back at a higher level to others.

In order to be effective vessels, facilitators must regularly practice energy techniques, such as:

- Grounding and centering themselves before going into sessions
- Clearing their minds so as to be fully present and mindful toward others
- Learning to relax in peace and knowing; opening up to obtaining guidance from universal energy sources

Drawing Out Meaning

Powerful facilitators encourage others’ inner wisdom to emerge, through their questions. Unlike experts, they do not ask with the ‘correct answer’ in mind. Rather, they pose questions to

shift conversations, open doors and evoke personal exploration. Their spirit is one of inquiry and curiosity.

Curiosity invites individuals to look for their own answers. By finding answers in themselves, people become more resourceful and energized. Enduring learning takes place because it comes from within, rather than from external analysis. This kind of learning is important in facilitation because it leads to sustainable change and growth.

Furthermore, genuine curiosity builds powerful relationships. By encouraging individuals and groups to reveal themselves in safe ways, facilitators create connections and belonging. Information garnered through authenticity is likely to be less censored and carefully crafted. While sessions will be ‘messier’, they will also uncover deeper insights and discoveries about feelings, motivation and values. Conversations will be more real – which is precisely what facilitators are going for.

To bring out rich meaning and depth of feeling, consider these questions:

- Do I genuinely believe people already possess all answers within, and thereby join them in questing to discover who they really are?
- Do I make others feel special? (i.e., their lives are worthy of exploration)
- How can I generate wonder and playfulness, using curiosity?

Techniques for Engagement

The range of techniques available to you for creating engagement is limited only by your imagination. As an Organizational Development Team Leader in my previous workplace, I used various tools to create possibilities and expansiveness, thinking and conversations. Sample ideas follow:



- Throughout an intensive corporate Coaching Program, I used meditation and guided visualization to open and/or close the group’s energy. These energy techniques either centered people to participate in sessions, or allowed them to release stress and preoccupations accumulated during the program.
- Two members of an Operations team became involved in a personal conflict that was starting to affect interactions within and outside of meetings. Given the Company’s culture to openly deal with conflicts, I employed a “didgeridoo” (Australian musical instrument) as a ‘talking stick’, so people could express what they needed to without interruption or judgment. While eclectic, it worked.
- Retreat participants arrived feeling demoralized, unmotivated, and drained from aggressive business unit start-up activity. So, we used journal writing in powerful ways to express soul-searching, loss of purpose and vision, and a host of other ‘wounds’. Deeply emotional, this served to clear enormous amounts of stored rage and grief, leaving people drained yet re-energized.

Even in workplaces where opportunities to express oneself physically, emotionally and spiritually are seemingly narrow, it is still possible to incorporate ‘small’ actions to unleash spirit:

- Start and/or close meetings and training sessions with inspirational quotes, poems, and readings; do not under-estimate these apparently insignificant gestures.
- During a session purportedly about unlocking innovation, I had participants write personal creativity affirmations. No one was the ‘wiser’, but it opened possibility.
- Hold weekly *Chicken Soup for the Soul* groups over lunch; attendees read a story per week as homework and then share their observations and learning when together.

- Incorporate visual, auditory, and other sensory exercises from books like *The Artist's Way (At Work)* or *The Veins of Gold* into your facilitation.
- You can even share inspirations like *Angel Cards* or *Quote of the Day* sayings as a small ritual to start everyone's day in your team.

Or, use short fill-in-the-blanks to help individuals and groups connect to their purpose, in meeting, training, and on-the-job settings. Some of my favorites are:

- I am _____
- I love to _____
- I keep being drawn to _____
- I am most myself when I am _____
- I shine when _____
- I would like to change in the world _____

The Soul of Facilitation

“Most people have jobs that are too small for their spirits.” (Studs Terkel)

As facilitators, we are profoundly committed to working with others to create healthy workplaces and to being creators of good. As we become increasingly soul-infused, we actively seek to take our soul to work, or else we experience mounting discontent. Among our many roles, we include influencing, cajoling, and otherwise driving forward development of diverse communities in which we work. As such, we have a significant part to play in helping the world to realize benefits of fostering inspiration, respect, dignity, and hope.



Spirituality in the Workplace

While we still too seldom think of going about daily business in ways that care for our soul, work does have the potential to stir our deepest longings. More than a job, work is a vital means of soul-expression.

As a new era dawns, evidence of individuals' quest for spiritual renewal is everywhere. It is found in burgeoning interests to discover and create meaning and purpose. It is likewise seen in feelings of personal emptiness and disillusionment about things here on Earth. As these basic questions explode in our collective consciousness, companies are slowly embracing the notion that employees have spiritual needs and aspirations. In fact, they expect their organizations to provide compelling visions that speak to higher causes.

Personally, I hold great hope that purpose, meaning, and character in business life will one day be seen as completely linked to the 'bottom-line'. Generating profits and nurturing spirits will no longer be mutually exclusive. To thrive, if not survive, companies will be required to boost their 'spiritual intelligence' – meaning valuing and supporting full expression of people's inner spirit at work.

To assess how much soul exists in your life and workplace, examine these points:

- Does your work diminish or increase you?
- Do you and others experience fun, joy, creativity, and exhilaration in your work?
- Which aspects of your work would you consider meaningful and aligned with personal values, and which are out of kilter?

Prophets in Our Own Lands

Facilitators-as-prophets understand that change is inevitable and they try to rally others to meet new and future challenges. Prophets are innovators, challengers of accepted norms. They

are often unheard or discredited. They may be viewed with hostility because people are conditioned to see change as threatening. No matter what, we must try not to take others' reactions personally.

Introducing soul into organizations tests stamina and faith. At those moments, we must remember everyone wants more love, not fear, and they yearn to let their spirits soar. They just don't know how; our role is to teach them. We are here to cast off feelings of emptiness haunting colleagues' souls.

It also takes time to implement programs of renewal and change; failure is inevitably caused by unrealistic timetables and impatient demands. Spiritual work has its own rhythms, like seasons and harvesting. As pioneers, we are on a mission to make the world a better place. Workplaces are our laboratories.

I invite you to reflect upon these points for a few moments:

- No one else can validate your value; you must give it to yourself
- Listen to what others need; look for the seeds of learning contained in others' perceptions
- Be flexible; over-developed strengths may work against you as things change

Practicing Extreme Self-Care

Self-care is like oxygen – something we cannot live without. Knowing the huge toll constant struggling, persevering, and transformational effort exact on us, it is vital to take time for regular rest and renewal. As facilitators, we cannot, nor should not, expect to go indefinitely without stepping back from the 'fray'.

From the coaching world, I borrow 'extreme self-care' to describe this requirement to look after ourselves above all else. We cannot be of service to others until we first are able to serve ourselves. While some label this as selfish, I call it survival. For example, I retreat



regularly to my “Plant Room Sanctuary” at home – my space to reflect, read, write, listen to music, and restore my battered soul, wounded by the constant battle of being prophet, visionary, pioneer, and healer.

Ironically, paying attention to nurturing your heart and soul actually correlates directly to external success; the less we try to accomplish and the more we allow ourselves to ‘be’, the more our spirits grow and the more our outer world reflects the inner. By listening to one’s inner voice, meditating, retreating, going into nature, and so on, one ‘engineers energy’ to maintain maximum productivity and overall zest for life.

Consider these suggestions for remembering your spirit:

- Brainstorm and slowly incorporate ten Daily Habits into your life that bring you joy, renewal, relaxation, and pleasure
- Design your surroundings to include a quiet space – a sanctuary for mind, body, soul
- Begin and end each day with an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving

The Presenter

Carol-Ann Hamilton is an Organizational Development practitioner with over 17 years’ experience in corporate Canada. Her most recent project involved facilitating a business unit start-up, using her expertise in dealing with change/transitions issues, team building, and leadership development. As Owner and Principal of *Spirit Unlimited*, Carol-Ann provides customized workshops, retreats, and coaching services to help individuals, teams, and organizations weave an abiding sense of Soul and Spirit into the fabric of their daily lives.

Profoundly committed to a vision-oriented, values-based life, Carol-Ann considers herself a catalyst for growth, transformation, and healing. She believes the changes we seek start within us through some form of inner discipline. Her personal mission is to encourage, nurture

and enthuse people to explore, discover and create purposeful and fulfilled lives. Clients frequently comment on her caring approach, sincerity, and ability to create a safe atmosphere.