

Appreciative Facilitation Hints for Round Table Moderators

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One important component of HDHS gatherings has been the round table process. Round tables provide a hub for presentation, inquiry and discussion around core topics that are evolving within the HDHS community and the wider network of scholars and practitioners exploring similar topics. They consist of a series of presentations followed by an open forum for questions and comments to presenters. Typically, they are about two hours long. Round tables are crucial learning laboratories in the process of theory development, and as such, they comprise the bulk of our structured interaction during our gatherings.

The role of round table moderators is both logistical and relational. On the logistical end, it is helpful if moderators make sure that all round-table participants understand the timeframe for the roundtable, and that they be prepared to share their thoughts within the allotted time. It is also advised that moderators email presenters before the conference inviting questions about the process and providing relevant details regarding time, venue and the overall roundtable process. When the round table begins, make sure that each presenter is well introduced to the group. Generally bios are available on the website prior to the annual meetings, but asking presenters to remind us of their names and their affiliation is helpful to the group and confers respect for each presenter.

On the relational side, the moderator's role is to help create a humiliation free environment supportive of all presenters and audience members. The HDHS network incorporates people from all over the world, often from different sides of ongoing conflicts. Often they may hold differing viewpoints on how to approach complex issues. On occasion, disagreements or even conflict, can arise, particularly during the period of open inquiry and discussion that follows presentations.

In keeping with the appreciative framework embraced by our growing HDHS network, the following thoughts are offered to moderators to assist them in creating an environment of safety, non-judgment, respect and lively inquiry that fosters deep learning and human dignity at the same time. These thoughts represent one set of insights about the process. Other thoughts are welcome!

⑩ **Modeling respect and caring.** The beauty of the work we are doing is that we have the opportunity to walk our talk. Contradicting humiliation and honoring dignity are dynamic relational activities. Our challenge is to become more and more mindful of our own actions and how they impact others.

Any time we are entrusted with the responsibility of facilitating a group process, it is important to remember that we can "set the tone" for the group. True to the premises of appreciative inquiry, this means that, generally speaking, our appreciation, our respect, and our care for the feelings of group members, elicits the same qualities from the group. This is not a manipulation; rather it is a conscious choice to align oneself to life-affirming, dignity-affirming behaviors.

Experience and our own intuitive knowing, tells us that when we treat others with respect, they respond in kind. Respect and caring show up in many ways. How we introduce people, our facial expression and tone of voice, eye contact (when culturally appropriate), ensuring equal time, and thanking people are all means for expressing respect and care.

⑩ **Paying attention.** Listen deeply to each speaker with interest and focus. One thing that is sure to humiliate (and we all know this from our life experience) is to offer our voice to a group and believe that others are not listening or paying attention. Keep your mind, your heart and your physical attentiveness (via body language and eye contact) on each presenter as they are sharing. Paying attention creates a feedback loop of creative mutuality. As a relational practice, paying attention is one half of a learning exchange wherein the listeners is open to receiving and integrating new information, and the speaker, feeling connected to the listener, offers her or his knowledge with enhanced confidence, often accessing a deeper flow of wisdom or understanding in the process.

⑩ **Staying present in the midst of the unexpected.** Due to the differing social and historic contexts represented at our meetings, and the complexities that often accompany these contexts, difficult emotions can arise between people, particularly if they come from areas of intractable and unresolved conflict. These are the unanticipated “curve balls” that can seem to create instability in the container that you’ve helped to foster through respect, caring and attention. Yet, conflict also means opportunity for all participants to be heard more deeply, and for the community as a whole to demonstrate its commitment to human dignity.

At times like this, the moderator can, once again, set a tone of respect and calm, assisting the group to explore the tensions in a spirit of curiosity and support rather than fear. Simple techniques like focusing on your breath can keep you in the present moment – where you need to be – rather than in reactivity or fear. This slows down your heart rate and moderates your physiological reactions, keeping you calm and more flexible to respond respectfully to the situation.

⑩ **Respectfully handling conflict.** When people are in conflict, try to stay connected with both or all parties, treating them with equal respect and maintaining ease and a sense of lightness. Often your own confidence that respectful struggle can be fruitful helps put people at ease. It may be useful to encourage people to use “questions of genuine curiosity” that aim at truly understanding another’s perspective, not judging it.

If you sense that the group is gaining valuable depth from the discussion, and dignity is being honored, you may choose to suggest that the focus remain on the particular discussion at hand, asking others to hold their questions and comments unless they build on the topic being explored.

Sometimes as a moderator, you have to make a judgment call if you feel that conflict dynamics are replicating patterns of historic humiliation. This can be a delicate situation where you are looking to maintain a deep appreciation for all

concerned and at the same time be mindful of how unconscious humiliation patterns may be unfolding in the interchange

Maintaining a compassionate alliance to all concerned may mean interrupting the flow of the exchange and expressing appreciation for the deep feelings on all sides of the conflict, while acknowledging that the time constraints and structure of our meeting can't do justice to addressing all of the complexities of the historic conflicts. You can then speak privately with both parties after the round table to see how they are doing and/or have a deeper conversation about the dynamics that you observed.

At other times, you may wish to call upon someone else in the room who you feel can offer a reorienting perspective, which can help the group to go deeper without restimulating hurts. You may want to ask them outright by saying, "Jorge, I wonder if you have a perspective on this that could shed new light?" Or, you may wish to interject your own "moderating" insight, which can help people regain a sense of their common bonds, even if the common bond is the fact that both sides are suffering.

⑩ **Humility, lightness and fun.** Remember that you are among friends! Particularly if difficult emotions do arise, it is not your job to figure it all out. Remain transparent. You will not have all the right answers or all the right moves all the time. You are trying your best to be of service to the group. When you feel stuck, say so. "Hmm, right now I'm not really sure how to be serve the process. Does anyone have a suggestion?" We are all in this together and even though you are a moderator, sometimes being in the hot seat can feel a bit too hot! Ask others to join in. You may particularly invite someone who you feel could better handle the situation in that particular moment to offer some insight. Humility asks us to forego expectations of perfection! Sharing your own imperfections allows others to let down their own protective armor. The truth is that there are no magic formulas for complex conflict situations. The best resource we have is the fullness of our own humanity and our intention to honor each other's dignity. Holding yourself lightly is an invitation to others to do the same. Keep a sense of humor and have fun! We are all here to learn!

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