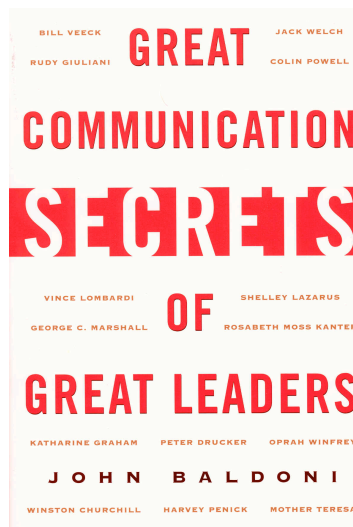


Facilitating Dialogue

by

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Facilitated Dialogue

One method that is fast gaining in popularity is the facilitated dialogue—inviting a skilled facilitator to conduct a dialogue between the leader and the audience. Turning things over to a facilitator leaves the leader free to concentrate on the message—what does she or he want to say, and why? The facilitator will be briefed in advance and told what points need to be made; it will be up to him or her to bring out these points from the leader and from members of the audience. A facilitated dialogue will still require much preparation—drafting the messages, shaping the presentation ideas, even providing visual support, if desired.

The advantages of a facilitated dialogue are that it encourages the participation of both leader and audience. It enables people to contribute their own ideas, and it enables the group to build on the ideas of others. The leader becomes an active participant in shaping the process. Leader and followers collaborate in a shared process that can lead to greater understanding, and ultimately to greater levels of trust.

One thing to remember: The leader should have the last word in a facilitated dialogue. This enables the leader to sum up the meeting and take ownership of the process. The leader may invite others to offer their final words, but he or she should be the one to close. This act affirms her or his leadership and responsibility for leading the group.

- § Brief the facilitator beforehand. Let the facilitator know the issues and the topics to be discussed.
- § Ask the facilitator to develop a list of questions to ask the leader.
- § Invite the facilitator to provide periodic summaries of the discussion so that everyone in the group stays together.
- § Require the facilitator to keep the meeting on time and on task. The facilitator should focus discussion on the issues, not go into extraneous topics. (There may be times, however, when there will be a deliberate veer in the dialogue in order to cover hot issues or deal with unexpected surprises.)
- § Ask the facilitator to summarize, but then invite the leader to close the dialogue.

Hints on Facilitated Dialogue

When staging a facilitated dialogue, consider the following:

The bottom line is that leadership communications is about content and meaning. A facilitated dialogue can be a wonderful way to explore new ideas as well as to affirm organizational values and create deeper levels of trust.

[Adapted from Chapter 9]