

Facilitation, Communication & Listening ...

The second in this series, pulls back the curtains on Weekend Workshops, with an emphasis on Communication skills & Listening.

[For More Amanuenses Soft Skills Articles, Click Here](#)



Fully Listen First, and then Respond

When I meet a “Candidate” new to the [Singapore QP](#), I often get asked a question about the [Professional Programme](#); what is a weekend Professional Development (PD) Workshop like?

Having listened, my answer is simple; there are three things they should expect to experience.

First, PD Workshops are a platform to demonstrate their learning, by presenting prepared answers to set questions. Second, they provide the opportunity to demonstrate (and strengthen) their team working capabilities, by collaboratively working on questions. And third, PD Workshops are a chance to develop their network amongst like-minded professionals.

Interestingly, a very similar question arises when we train new Workshop Facilitators (WFs); what is expected of them during a PD Workshop?

Having listened, my response is different.

The role of “Facilitator” I say, requires them to manage a “process”, that process being to “evaluate” Candidates. They will evaluate (and grade) individual answers that Candidates provide, as well as the team work taking place. They’ll also draw on their communication skills, to create a safe space for conversation, engaging interaction, and critical sharing.

Sometimes confusion and push-back can occur, especially where the person asking me the question has a different perception of what a PD Workshop might entail. It can feel as if they aren't listening, but instead, telling me what they want to hear. Let's lift the veil and clarify.

Teacher, Trainer, Presenter, or, Facilitator?

To fully appreciate what a PD Workshop is, and what Candidates and WFs do, it's important to understand its purpose and place inside the Singapore QP. To do that, we need to step back even further, to explain key differences between teaching, training, presenting, and, facilitating.

Teaching and training have a similar purpose, that being the acquisition of knowledge and skills by others. It requires "giving" content, and, is supported by a feedback loop. Feedback focuses more on "getting", to confirm that the intended acquisition (i.e. that learning) has taken place.

Teaching is associated with long-run formal learning. Students acquire knowledge in the form of theory and concept. Typically, this is well in advance of its application, and usually prior to entry into the full-time workforce. The feedback loop can be by way of informal interaction and questioning, or, using more formal quizzes, tests or exams.

Training is more often associated with short, sharp, learning. Participants acquire skills and ability to perform a task, often with a little relevant underpinning knowledge. This is typically as their need arises, and usually to prepare for a job, or improve job performance within the workforce. The feedback loop requires practise steps to develop and hone skills, as well as measurements to confirm that defined task performance and quality levels have been reached.

Presenting has a different purpose, i.e., to provide information to others. It is about "giving", focused on informing, persuading, and entertaining others, perhaps even bringing about change. The need for a feedback loop (if any) is dependent on the purpose of the content delivered.

Though the processes involved in teaching, training and presenting may vary, they have one thing in common; they all need "Content" to impart to their respective audiences. That content is usually provided by the Teacher, the Trainer, or the Presenter.

Facilitating is different, as its purpose is to manage others through a "Process". The Facilitator needs strong, effective, communications skills, because facilitation is more of a "guiding" role. On the Singapore QP, WFs are purposefully there to guide Candidates through "evaluation", of "Content" prepared and provided by the Candidates; PD Workshops are not "teaching" events.

This is where the Singapore QP is different, as the Professional Programme requires self-directed learning. It's also why confusion can sometimes occur, because of differences in perception.

Effective Facilitators, are Great Listeners

Effective Facilitators need strong communication skills. They need to hold positive intentions as they connect, support, encourage, summarise, clarify, paraphrase, probe, push back, reflect, reframe, question answers, answer questions, give feedback, and, receive feedback too.

Listening is a crucial component for effective communication. It is the glue that joins great communications together. Yet, it is something that we rarely intentionally practice, isn't it? Listening means being aware, paying attention, making meaning. It requires us to process what we notice, without favour, or bias. This may be less common than we might otherwise prefer.

Great listeners are therefore inclusive, and suspend any judgement of the person, no matter how different they might or might not be. Rather than choosing to hear only what they want to hear, they put aside any potential there may be for becoming entrapped in "selective perception".

They listen by paying attention to the non-verbal communications, to see what messages are transmitted. They listen to the sounds spoken, to get a sense of the emotions conveyed. They listen to hear all of the words voiced, so that they can fully understand the message transmitted.

They encourage others to speak, checking in to ensure that they hear what has been said. They probe where necessary, to ensure the message is coming across as intended. Above all else, they are empathetic. They put themselves in the other person's shoes, to fully grasp the intended meaning; not just what was said, but what was truly meant when saying it.

In closing our focus on the importance of listening, think for a moment about people that really matter to you. By this, I mean people like your boss, colleagues, clients, spouse, children, parents, family and friends. What if they listened, yes really listened, to every word you said?

Rather than judging you and jumping to conclusions, what would happen if instead, they positively engaged, patiently probed, and actively listened, to deepen their understanding of what your words really meant? Can you imagine just how different your life might become?

That's the power of great listening, and why mastery is an invaluable skill for effective WFs.

Article by Patrick O'Brien, Chartered Manager (CMgr) and Managing Director of The Amanuenses Network Pte Ltd. Amanuenses help people bring about personal growth and organisational change through the delivery of soft skills training solutions. Connect with Patrick via the website www.Amanuenses.Net.