

DR. LOIS FRANKEL

Get and keep the job you want.

I once had a boss who used to say, “Managing would be fun if it weren’t for the people.” Well, one basic truism of leadership is that most of a manager’s work is accomplished with and through others. Dr. John Miller, a recent addition to the CCI coaching team, has had extensive experience helping managers and informal group leaders enhance their group leadership skills. Whether you lead staff meetings, head project teams, or make presentations to your management committee, you’ll find these 10 tips from John helpful:

1. ***Establish a friendly atmosphere.*** When group members arrive, make them feel welcome by letting them know that you are glad to have them in the group. Throughout the meeting, observe the behaviors and emotions of the group. If people are beginning to look isolated or estranged, bring them back into the discussion by asking for their opinions or thoughts. Your behavior serves as a model for other group members to be inclusive, friendly, and warm to one another.
2. ***Bring everyone up to date.*** At the beginning of the meeting, review the events leading up to the current group session. This helps to put everyone on the same page and establishes a climate of problem solving and open sharing of related issues. Emphasize previous accomplishments of the group to give members the sense they have worked effectively in the past and can continue to do so in the future.
3. ***Define the agenda for the meeting.*** Clearly state what you plan to cover during the meeting. If it’s a problem solving session, state the problem or issue clearly and be sure that the group agrees that this is the reason why they came together. Don’t try to push an agenda or solve a problem that the group is in disagreement over or doesn’t feel is important – the group won’t be motivated to participate. Similarly, don’t view this as resistance that you have to break through. Paradoxically, having the flexibility to meet the group’s needs is one aspect of strong leadership. Once everyone agrees on the agenda items, timeframe for the meeting, or specified problem you can then move forward productively.
4. ***Gather all relevant data.*** Getting and dealing with relevant information is at the heart of any team effort. Come to meetings prepared with data and be sure that all members have contributed as much relevant data as they can about the topic or problem. Watch for non-verbal indications that some members might be holding back information or are reluctant to contribute. If so, bring them into the discussion by indicating that their ideas are valuable.
5. ***Summarize where the group stands.*** Sometimes the group may suddenly fall quiet after much discussion. This is normal and usually indicates that members are attempting to synthesize the information that has already been shared. In this case, help the group deal with “information overload” by briefly summarizing the main points of the discussion.

6. ***Seek consensus from group members.*** If it appears that one or more members have withdrawn, help them back into the group by either asking them to express their thoughts, or telling them what you are perceiving. For example, you can say, “I get the feeling that you are uncomfortable with this decision. Is that right?” This gives the reluctant group members permission to freely discuss what is on their mind. Hidden thoughts often derail commitment.
7. ***Clarify conflict issues.*** Conflict between group members can be a frightening event for group leaders – even seasoned ones. Tempers tend to flare and egos get involved. Unless properly managed, conflict escalates and people become personally and emotionally involved. The reality is that most conflicts can be managed productively if the leader attempts to objectively clarify what each party is saying and pinpoints the area(s) of disagreement. Keep the discussion centered on the facts and do not let it degenerate into a personal exchange. Remember, conflict is natural, and often very productive. Unresolved or ego-centered conflict is destructive.
8. ***Be supportive.*** Remember that each member has something to contribute to the problem solving process. Treating each person with respect and dignity increases the likelihood of getting valuable input. If the group starts to attack a member, steer the group’s attention back to the task at hand and make it a ground rule that problems, not people, are aggressively attacked. Reassure the hurt members that their contribution is valued.
9. ***Fill in the missing roles.*** There’s a maxim to leadership that says, “the leader provides the followers with what the followers can’t provide themselves.”
When it comes to group meetings, there are many roles (such as initiator, information giver, compromiser, etc.) that need to be played for a group to be successful. As the leader, you need to play the missing roles that will help the group reach its goal.
10. ***Look and listen.*** Be on the lookout for issues that are sidetracking the group from accomplishing its purpose. Watch for body language such as a frown, crossed arms, looking out the window, and other signs that a member is disagreeing or estranged from the group. Do not let one or two members dominate the group. This tends to shut others out and may lead the group down the wrong path. The strength of a group lies in getting all its members to be productively engaged.

If you would like a copy of Dr. Miller’s full article on group dynamics and leadership, just reply with “Send Article” in the subject line.

Best regards,

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D.