PATTERNS IN LEADING A GROUP DISCUSSION

When using the Basic Discussion Model, it helps to be familiar and comfortable with several common situations and know how experienced leaders handle them. You will gradually develop your own ways of handling them, that best suit your own personality and the needs of the group. But until then, here are some specific recommendations for dealing with beginnings and endings, handling disagreements, keeping a discussion focused and moving along.

SITUATION	WHAT TO DO	EXAMPLE
1. GETTING STARTED	* Assure pleasant climate, no interruptions before the sessions begins. Uncluttered, tidy space. * Provide a context as the session begins: what we are doing is important. * First question should be asked with precision. Have it written down before you start.	"Let's get started now Jim will you please shut the door. At the annual meeting we decided to establish a more effective communication system. We need to get this in place quickly and smoothly to ensure participation of the entire community. What are the elements of a good communication system?"
2. KEEPING TRACK OF IDEAS	* Write brief phrases on your own note pad after each response. * Ask one or two participants to take notes. * Use notes to recap between questions. * Use notes for writing reports.	"You mentioned these elements." (Read back the list) " Which is most crucial to.....?"
3. KEEPING THE DISCUSSION GOING	* If nobody answers, repeat the question; reword or rephrase only as a last resort. * If participants are going off the topic, repeat the question. * If someone grandstands or talks for a long time, ask for a specific example; ask if someone else has an example.	"Someone else, how will a new communication system affect the community?"

PATTERNS IN LEADING A GROUP DISCUSSION (Cont'd)

SITUATION	WHAT TO DO	EXAMPLE
4. MAINTAINING FOCUS	* When the group begins to stray off the subject, recap briefly what has been said so far. * Acknowledge and "bracket" the distraction. * Repeat the question.	"That is an important concern. Let's bring it up next time we do a problem analysis. Now, someone say how will the new communication system affect the community?"
5. KEEPING THE DISCUSSION PRACTICAL	* When you introduce the question, give a practical example yourself. * When an answer is abstract or merely gives the person's judgement, ask for an example from their own experience.	"The Community Bulletin Board in North Bend caught my eye the other morning. What are some other practical examples of good communication?"
6. RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS	* You don't have to. It is helpful to have many points of view in the discussion. * If people argue, don't take sides, but ask the group if there are any other viewpoints. * If someone disagrees, have them say what their own idea is, rather than just disagree.	"Strong feelings are ok, but we have to get a wide range of ideas, too." " It looks like we have at least three angles to cover. Are there any others?"
7. BRINGING THE DISCUSSION TO A CLOSE	* Review what was discussed. * Let the group know how the results will be used. * Tell them when they wil receive the results and acknowledge their participation.	"We have covered a lot of ground in just a few minutes. Now let's move on to the problem solving workshop to decide on the specific action plans.