



Discussion Guidelines

Our Purpose

To build a communication model that supports our mission of promoting women's blogging through education, practice, exposure and community.

Our Philosophy

1. We are all here for a common purpose.
2. Treat others the way you want to be treated.
3. Listen twice as much as you speak.
4. Value dialogue: Everyone has something to contribute.
5. An honest and positive environment fosters better discussions, ideas and results.
6. Balance seriousness with humor – life is short!

Our Rules

- 1. Treat others the way you want to be treated.**
To put it another way, we value intellectual honesty above all, and we know we can find a way to be intellectually honest without being rude.
- 2. No PowerPoint®.**
We believe PowerPoint presentations do not enhance our open discussion format. You should prepare for your panel discussion, but do not use PowerPoint® in your presentation. Exceptions have been made for instruction-based sessions.
- 3. Five to ten-minute limits.**
No one person or group of people, including the panels, should talk for more than five to ten minutes at a time. If you find that a person or group of people is dominating a discussion, ask for opinions or questions from others in the room.
- 4. The group alters the agenda.**
If you need to shorten the agenda to fit the allocated time, **ask the group to decide** if an item can be saved for post-conference discussions. Refer to the How to Moderate section. Remember, we can blog about it afterwards.
- 5. Use a designator when necessary.**
A designator is an object that shows a person has the right to speak. If people are talking over each other or interrupting, then you should use one. In most cases the microphone is the designator, and it is passed to the next person so that she can speak. In a smaller session without a microphone, substitute an object if you feel it is necessary to have one.

6. Inform, do not shill.

We understand that people bring expertise from the field they work, but this is not a vendor conference. There is a fine line between informing the group and pitching to the group. To avoid shilling:

- ◆ **Disclose where you work.** Tell the group that you work for a company in the field you are talking about, especially when one of your products/services is under discussion.
- ◆ **Avoid talking about your products/services**—you’re less likely to start pitching it to us. If possible, let someone else describe them for you.¹
- ◆ **Do not compare your products/services to competitors.** Let others do that.
- ◆ **Give us just the facts ma’am** – If you have to talk about your products, do not give your opinion about it or your competitor’s products.
- ◆ **Call others on their shilling** – Politely tell someone they’re promoting and not informing. Give them a chance to rephrase or alter what they are saying. They may not realize they are doing it.

Roles of the Moderator

Throughout the discussion the moderator will have to perform different roles depending on the audience and the topic: Traffic Cop, Devil’s Advocate, Diplomat and Comic.⁵ .

The Traffic Cop

- ◆ Ensure everyone stays on topic.
- ◆ Ensure everyone who wants to speak gets the opportunity.
- ◆ Ask questions so information flows to and from the audience.
- ◆ Ensure no one dominates the conversation.
- ◆ Give warnings if any speaker runs over time.

The Devil’s Advocate

- ◆ Challenge a consensus to promote divergent opinions.
- ◆ Ask the question people seem to be avoiding or afraid to ask.

The Diplomat

- ◆ Remind people that everyone’s opinion matters.
- ◆ Highlight areas of agreement among members.
- ◆ Quell arguments that do not move the discussion forward.
- ◆ Rephrase statements if it seems that someone did not interpret them correctly.
- ◆ Make sure everyone plays nicely.

The Comic

- ◆ Relieve tension. Discussions are supposed to be fun.
- ◆ Remind participants why we are all here.

How to Moderate

Getting Started

- ◆ Begin on time. Latecomers can find out more in the chat discussion or in the live blogging.
- ◆ Give brief introductions.
- ◆ Go over the agenda and objectives of the discussion.
- ◆ Briefly review our philosophy and rules.
- ◆ Ask questions about the topic to determine where to start the discussion.

Keeping the Discussion Moving Forward

- ◆ Act in the different roles of the moderator: Traffic Cop, Devil's Advocate, Diplomat and Comic.
- ◆ Monitor your level of participation – are you dominating the conversation?
- ◆ Keep track of ideas, point out repeated ones, summarize and move forward.
- ◆ Ask another question if the group has gotten stuck on one topic or if the discussion stops. Prepare questions beforehand to help you.

Finishing

- ◆ Give a 15- and 5-minute warning.
- ◆ Sum up the main points raised.
- ◆ Sum up what was unresolved.
- ◆ Sum up conclusions made.
- ◆ Created a to-do list, if applicable.
- ◆ Ask the bloggers in the room to capture the summation.
- ◆ Thank everyone for attending.

When Good Participants Go Bad

Bloggers are passionate about what they do. Sometimes that passion can get misdirected and a heated discussion could turn downright ugly. And what was once a great session becomes a room full of uncomfortable people. The disrupters at a conference can usually be divided into four groups: Mockers, Interrupters, Know-It-Alls, and Attackers.⁵

If a good participant turns bad in one of your sessions, make your way over to the participant and discreetly deal with the situation. If you have to or feel you need to address the problem publicly, do it in the nicest and politest way possible.

Remember: They probably do not realize they are causing a problem.

Mockers

- ◆ Ask them to elaborate on what they said. Let them know a comment, like “That’s dumb,” needs to be explained.
- ◆ Reiterate that everyone has something to contribute.

Interrupters

- ◆ Let the interrupter know that the person did not finish her thought.
- ◆ Let the person who was interrupted know that she should continue her thought.
- ◆ Discreetly and nicely suggest to the interrupters that they write down their thoughts so they can contribute them when there is a pause or blog them later.

Know-It-Alls

- ◆ Acknowledge that the person has expertise in the area you are discussing.
- ◆ Nicely ask the person to let others share their knowledge and opinions.

Attackers

- ◆ Move the focus away from the individuals. Write ideas on a white board or easel pad. Have them talk to the points and not at each other.
- ◆ If it’s getting personal, jump in and end the discussion.
- ◆ If it’s not related to the discussion, tell them to talk about it later.
- ◆ If all else fails, ask them to leave.

References

1. Camahort, Elisa. "Do panels suck? I'm not entirely convinced." Worker Bees Blog. 26 April 2005. Worker Bees. 5 June 2005 <<http://workerbeesblog.blogspot.com/2005/04/do-panels-suck-im-not-entirely.html>>
2. Clavier, Jeff. "Panels are dead ? - Not quite - Just prepare them better." Software Only. 01 May 2005. 5 June 2005 <http://blog.softtechvc.com/2005/05/panels_are_dead.html>.
3. Hodder, Mary. "Panels are Dead." Napsterization. 25 April 2005. 5 June 2005 <<http://napsterization.org/stories/archives/000434.html>>.
4. "How to Lead Effective Meetings." Academic Leadership Support. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 12 Jun. 2005 <<http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/academicleadershipsupport/howto1.htm>>.
5. Morgan, Nick. Harvard ManageMentor on Running a Meeting: A Practical Guide to Planning, Facilitating, and Managing Meetings. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Background

These guidelines were written for the BlogHer conference held on 30 July 2005 in Santa Clara, CA. They evolved out of numerous discussions by the conference organizers and advisory board.

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