**ROLE FUNCTIONS IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

**AND RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING**

**ROLE FUNCTIONS**

     The members of an efficient and productive discussion group must provide for meeting two kinds of needs--what it takes to do the job, and what it takes to strengthen and maintain the group. What members do to serve group needs may be called functional roles. Statements and behaviors which tend to make the group inefficient or weak may be called nonfunctional roles.

     Here is a list of the kinds of contributions which are performed by one or several group members:

1. **TASK ROLES** (functions required in selecting and carrying out a group task, given below in sequence).
   1. **Initiating:** Getting things started, suggesting new ideas, suggesting new definitions of the problem, trying a new attack on the problem, or introducing new material.
   2. **Giving and asking for information:** Offering facts or generalizations, sharing understanding of a topic, giving information freely, soliciting everyone's input, gathering information.
   3. **Giving and asking for reactions:** Stating opinions and reactions, sharing feelings about what has been said, getting reactions from all group members, seeking clarification of values, suggestions or ideas.
   4. **Restating and giving examples:** By restating, the presenter of the original idea gets feedback; restating clarifies ideas. Examples reinforce meaning and aid understanding, they aid in the search for accurate statements of and understanding of an idea. Confronting and reality testing: Challenging ideas and information. Often groups allow misinformation and misstatements to pass by out of politeness. Learning takes place when ideas are challenged (politely, of course). Try to envision how a proposal might work if adopted, how an idea will work in the real world.
   5. **Clarifying, synthesizing and summarizing:** Clarifying ideas and previous statements, pulling together related ideas or suggestions after the group has discussed them. Clarifying, synthesizing and summarizing help provide closure.
2. **GROUP BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE ROLES** (functions required in strengthening and maintaining group life and activities).
   1. **Encouraging and sponsoring:** Being friendly warm, responsive to others, praising other for their ideas, agreeing with an accepting contributions of others, encouraging all members to contribute, sponsoring ideas of others, especially those who may be less aggressive in speaking out.
   2. **Gatekeeping and timekeeping:** Trying to make it possible for another member to make a contribution to the group by saying, "We haven't heard from Jane yet," or suggesting limited talking time for everyone so that all will have a chance to be heard, limiting discussion on a topic to an agreed-upon time limit.
   3. **Standard setting:** Expressing standards for the group to use in choosing its content or procedures or in evaluating its decisions, reminding the group to avoid decisions which conflict with group standards.
   4. **Following:** Going along with decisions of the group, thoughtfully accepting ideas of others, serving as audience during group discussion.
3. **BOTH GROUP TASK AND MAINTENANCE ROLES**
   1. **Evaluating:** Submitting group decisions or accomplishments to comparison with group standards, measuring accomplishments against goals.
   2. **Diagnosing:** Determining sources of difficulties, appropriate steps to take next and analyzing the main blocks to progress.
   3. **Testing for consensus:** Tentatively asking for group opinions in order to find out whether the group is nearing consensus on a decision, sending up trial balloons to test group opinions.
   4. **Mediating:** Harmonizing, conciliating differences in points of view, making compromise solutions.
   5. **Relieving tension:** Draining off negative feeling by jesting or pouring oil on troubled waters, putting a tense situation in a wider context.
4. **TYPES OF NONFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR**
   1. **Being aggressive:** Working for status by criticizing or blaming others, showing hostility against the group or some individual, deflating the ego or status of others.
   2. **Blocking:** Interfering with the progress of the group by going off on a tangent, citing personal experiences unrelated to the problem, arguing too much on a point, rejecting ideas without consideration.
   3. **Self-Confessing:** Using the group as a sounding board, expressing personal, non-group-oriented feelings or points of view.
   4. **Competing:** Vying with others to produce the best idea, to talk the most, to play the most roles, to gain favor with a leader.
   5. **Seeking sympathy:** Trying to induce other group members to be sympathetic to one's problems or misfortunes, deploring one's own situation, or disparaging one's own ideas to gain compliments or support.
   6. **Special pleading:** Introducing or supporting suggestions related to one's own pet concerns or philosophies, lobbying.
   7. **Horsing around:** Clowning continually, joking, mimicking and otherwise disrupting the work and progress of the group.
   8. Seeking recognition: Attempting to call attention to one's self by loud or excessive talking, extreme ideas, unusual behavior.
   9. Withdrawing: Acting indifferent or passive, not participating, daydreaming, whispering to others.
5. **IMPROVING GROUP PERFORMANCE**
   1. **Limit the group** to between five and nine members—five is ideal.
   2. Seek members with **diverse personality traits** and backgrounds to gain the benefits of diverse opinions and perspectives.
   3. **Don't be afraid of conflict--"**from heat comes light." Spirited exchange of opinions is desirable; infighting and personal attacks are counterproductive.
   4. **Practice the following:**

* Sponsoring other members.
* Giving encouragement and approval.
* Formulating and citing examples.
* Asking questions.

1. **LIST OF CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE** GROUPS
2. **Action orientation**--they get things done.
3. Prevalence of a **nonthreatening group climate**.
4. **Learning** is accepted as the raison d'etre of the group.
5. **Everyone participates** and interacts.
6. The **material is adequately and efficiently** **covered.**
7. **Evaluation** is accepted as an integral part of the group operation (i.e., no one gets defensive).
8. **Members attend regularly and come prepared**.
9. **BIGGEST** **PROBLEMS HINDERING GROUP EFFECTIVENESS**
   1. **Groupthink:** Everyone suppresses their real views to maintain group harmony and indicates that the group and all of its ideas are wonderful, and that competitors are stupid.
   2. **Lack of clear goals:** No one knows what they're there for.
   3. **Star complexes:** Vying for the spotlight.
   4. **Wallflowers:** Non-contributors.

**RULES FOR MAKING MEETINGS EFFECTIVE**

1. **AGENDA INTEGRITY:** All items on a meeting agenda should be discussed, and items not on the agenda should not be discussed. If agenda integrity maintained, people will read and respect a meeting's agenda.
2. **TIME INTEGRITY:** Begin on time and end on time – absolutely no exceptions. By waiting to start a meeting until everyone is present, you reward people for being late – forget being polite. Start on time even if it means starting alone. End precisely on time, and always state in the agenda what time frames are so everyone knows. Also, time integrity means sticking to the time allotted to discuss items. If you can't get closure, table the item and go to the next item on the agenda.
3. **THE** **FRACTION RULES**:
4. **The Rule of Halves:** No item can be entered on the agenda unless is has been given to the person who schedules the agenda items one-half of the time between meetings. This gives everyone enough time to plan and arrange agenda items and get them distributed in time for review, which is one of the most important ways to get intelligent participation in a meeting--making sure everyone has time to and is prepared for the meeting.
5. **The Rule of Three Quarters:** Agenda items should be distributed at the three-quarters point between meetings. The agenda should be distributed with any material required for effective preparation (including minutes of previous meetings, if minutes are involved).
6. **The Rule of Thirds:** Break meetings up into three parts. In the first one-third, handle minutes, make announcements and get one or two moderately easy items out of the way to get the group in a pattern of successful accomplishment. Schedule a moderately difficult item and the single most difficult and lengthy item in the middle third of the meeting (in this third of the meeting psychological focus, alertness, attention and attendance are all at their peaks). If the meeting is to run longer than one-and-a-half hours, give participants a brief break at the two-thirds point. In the final third of the meeting schedule For-Discussion-Only (FDO) items and schedule the easiest item as the very last item on the agenda in order to end on a positive, successful note. FDO items help release tensions and provide the opportunity for the ventilation of feelings and discussion of political orientations and ramifications. Two techniques to use during these discussions are the straw vote (an unofficial testing of the waters) and the in-principle notion (an agreement on a general orientation).
7. **RULES** **FOR A MEETING HEAD**
   1. Plan the meeting properly (remember the Rule of Fractions).
   2. Insure agenda and temporal integrity.
   3. Facilitate and clarify discussion.
   4. Remain objective and impartial.
   5. Move the discussion along.
   6. Get closure on items whenever possible.
   7. Bring the discussion to a close.
8. **RULES** **ABOUT FOOD**
   1. Allow coffee, but never beer, wine or booze.
   2. Provide refreshments at break time.
   3. The less food, the more work that gets done.
   4. Use food as a reward, available only after, never during a meeting.
9. **RULES** **FOR BETTER PARTICIPATION**
   1. Emphasize the agenda.
   2. Focus on decisions to be reached or items to be clarified.
   3. Target discussion.
   4. Orchestrate comments.
   5. Keep an open mind.
   6. Draw out silent members.
   7. Temper overbearing members' output.