

## WHY HIRE A FACILITATOR TO LEAD YOUR STRATEGY MEETINGS?

A couple of years ago I attended a conference geared to strategic planning professionals. It was a wonderful conference and I came home with fresh perspectives and some books to read. A good read was [Michael Wilkinson's book \*The Executive Guide to Facilitating Strategy\*](#), because it provides great advice to business leaders on how to lead strategy within your organization. I recently came back to that book and I want to highlight one of the appendices which describes when or why professional facilitators should be considered.

What a professional facilitator brings to your strategy meeting:

- Demonstrated processes that create a frame for your strategic plan;
- Numerous tools and techniques that allow them to adapt to your group; and
- The ability to help participants excel as a team by focusing on the issues, building a common vision, and creating commitment to the actions that will bring vision into reality.

You should hire an outside facilitator if:

- You don't have a clearly defined, tested and proven strategic planning process.
- You have expert meeting facilitators but none with an extensive track record for facilitating strategy.
- Your team has many individuals with strong opinions or the team has had trouble in the past in reaching consensus.
- You, as the group leader, have specific ideas of where the organization needs to go, but want to be open to other possibilities.
- The discussion is best guided by a neutral party to engender trust, participation and buy-in.

### **Choose a facilitator who has the right personality for your group**

Great facilitators adapt their delivery and communication to the group. For example, she will master a meeting of boardroom executives; keep a group of creative thinkers on track and will effectively involve everyone and fully engage a tableful of community leaders or volunteers.

### **Interview your facilitator**

Some people have a natural propensity to facilitate a group but may lack skill and intent for getting positive results. A good facilitator knows the keys to success; they understand what works, what doesn't and why. Make sure you are getting the best service for your investment.

Thorough consultation and consideration will ensure your strategy is gets results. A skilled facilitator can be a great investment making the process deeper and faster.

**WHO SHOULD YOU HIRE? SOMEONE WHO KNOWS YOUR INDUSTRY OR SOMEONE WHO IS A STRONG FACILITATOR OR BOTH?**



<p><b>Low facilitation skills/High industry knowledge</b> <i>Possible choice, but not recommended.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most dangerous of the four quadrants.</li> <li>• Facilitators in this group have a deep knowledge of your industry, but lack the skillset to overcome their own beliefs and lead the team to real ingenuity and needed results.</li> <li>• Facilitators tend to rely on their industry knowledge and expertise to guide the group.</li> <li>• The result is that they may dictate solutions, try to convince your team that they're right, and otherwise disempower the team because they lack the group skills, techniques, and awareness that come with facilitation expertise and experience.</li> </ul>	<p><b>High facilitation skills/High Industry Knowledge -</b> <i>Your best bet!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These facilitators are knowledgeable in your industry and have fine-tuned facilitation skills.</li> <li>• Because of their facilitation bias, they focus on facilitating the group and getting results.</li> <li>• With their knowledge of the industry, they are better able to question assumptions and offer perspectives for group consideration.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Low facilitation skills/low industry knowledge -</b> <i>Don't bother.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your team will readily recognize facilitators in this quadrant.</li> <li>• Their low facilitation skills and low industry knowledge will typically result in them offering so little value to the process that your team will wonder why they are in the room. Time wasted.</li> </ul>	<p><b>High facilitation skills/low industry knowledge -</b> <i>This is a good choice.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They focus on facilitating the group.</li> <li>• Your team supplies the industry expertise.</li> <li>• These facilitators need to gain a strong orientation in your business, to understand the business model and the industry language enough to not slow down your team.</li> </ul>