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HOW TO MAKE GROUP DISCUSSIONS CLICK

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension Bulletin 459 September 1964

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GROUP DISCUSSION is an effective way to stimulate people with a common interest, to share views, expose issues, and gain a clearer understanding of the problems. The more complex and interrelated the various elements of society become, the more helpful group discussion can be in identifying common problems and working toward their solution.

In order to be most productive, a discussion group needs organization and leadership. A discussion leader and a recorder are usually beneficial.

1. **The discussion leader's job** is to keep the group on the topic, make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak, and help the recorder get ideas written on paper.

2. **The recorder's job** is to write important points made by members of the discussion group and report these back to the total group when called upon by the discussion leader.

SOME GUIDES

If the group is fairly small (up to eight people) the entire group may enter into a discussion of the topic. If the group is larger, (eight to twelve) then the discussion leader may want to divide the group into small

work units from four to seven members. Each unit could have a discussion leader and recorder.

PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS

The discussion group can be most productive when it is free to direct all its attention and energy to the task assigned. Assist the groups by:

1. Having newsprint, china marker, blackboard, chalk, and eraser ready in case of need.
2. Arranging chairs in a circle, so each person can see everyone.
3. Providing table space or writing boards for the group.

TASK

1. Make clear what the discussion topic is, and the purpose of the discussion. Write discussion topic on blackboard or on individual slips of paper.
2. State amount of time to work as a small group.
3. Clarify that the reporter is to take notes, and tell him what he is expected to report to the total group.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS IN SMALL GROUPS

1. See that all get acquainted. Have each person introduce himself and tell a bit about himself. As a



newcomer joins the group later, introduce yourself to him and him to the group.

2. The leader may state the problem clearly and definitely for discussion or have the group state the problem.

3. Keep discussion in line with the topic but don't groove it too narrowly.

4. Remain attentive during discussion. Keep the session informal and encourage free-flowing conversation.

5. Encourage participation by the entire group and allow no one, including the leader, to monopolize the discussion.

6. See that every member of the group has a chance to participate. Use comments and devices which make for good feelings among members such as: "Mrs. Brown, you were about to say something." "Let's have some discussion of this question." "What do some of the rest of you think about this?" "Getting back to Miss White's point about . . ."

7. Give credit for good suggestions and encourage further thought on doubtful ones.

8. Be tactful, tolerant, and resourceful.

9. If you see that some important angle is being neglected, point it out: "Bill Jones was telling me last week that he thinks . . . What do you think of that?"

10. Let others lead. Keep spirits high. Encourage ease, informality, good humor. Let everyone have a good time. Foster friendly disagreement. Listen with

respect and appreciation to all ideas, but stress what is important, and turn discussion away from what is not.

11. Remember it is not what "I" as the leader thinks, but what the group thinks that matters.

12. End the meeting with a summary of the conclusions of the group. Help the recorder see that an effective summary is made.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MEMBERS IN SMALL GROUPS

1. Speak to all of the group, not just to the leader.
2. Be friendly when you disagree. You can disagree without being disagreeable.

3. Do not monopolize the time but don't keep good ideas to yourself.

4. Listen constructively to other members and try to incorporate their ideas into your thinking.

5. Build on what has been said rather than starting off on a new and unrelated tangent; take responsibility for keeping the discussion "on the ball."

6. Feel responsibility for the evolution of thought taking place, and try to find something valuable in your experience to contribute.

7. Be concerned that other members of the group are also having a constructive experience. Be prepared to ask questions of others to clarify their ideas rather than simply giving your own ideas.

8. Work hard. See humor and value in yourself and others. Enjoy yourself.

9. Take notes if you feel like it. It may help you keep track of the flow of ideas.

CLOSE THE DISCUSSION

1. Close on time.

2. Give the group a feeling of accomplishment by suggesting that while no "final answers" were achieved, there was a fruitful exchange of ideas.

3. Identify points that the group agreed on and suggest that those on which there is disagreement or indecision are topics for future discussions.

4. Give the group a chance to make suggestions for improving the next discussion.

5. Remind the group of the time and place for the next discussion. Encourage reading so as to get the most out of the meetings.