
Gifts and Hooks

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If you facilitate cross-functional teams within a large organization or community task forces assembled to address a specific issue, it is likely that there will be a large percentage of your team members who are unfamiliar with one another.

New teams are often a bit skeptical of facilitators – especially those team members who equate facilitation with “holding hands and singing kumbaya.” As a result, they can be especially reluctant to participate in traditional team building activities, viewing them as a waste of time. And even traditional icebreakers like, “Introduce yourself and tell us one thing about you that no one else in the room knows,” can be met with true disdain.

Yet, as a facilitator you know how important it is for the team to become familiar with one another before undertaking the tough work of the group.

So what do you do?

At Leadership Strategies, we have found “Gifts and Hooks” is an excellent technique that increases team familiarity, while feeling like “real work.” We first learned of this technique from Greg Brittingham at the Center for Public Policy, Virginia Commonwealth University. Here is how it works.

1. The facilitator provides a context for the exercise and defines the terms.
 - a. “Each person brings gifts to the table (skills, abilities, characteristics) that are valuable for the team in getting its work done. It is important that the team understand these gifts up front.”
 - b. “At the same time, each person also has one or more hooks. **Hooks** represent what the individual needs to experience to remain fully engaged and actively involved as the group progresses in its work.”
2. The facilitator then asks individuals to record their gifts and hooks on different colored cards or post-ittm notes (e.g., green for gifts, yellow for hooks). Depending on the size of the group, participants can work individually or in pairs to identify gifts and hooks.
3. The facilitator sets a one-minute time limit per person and then uses a round-robin to have people stand, share their gifts and hooks, and post them.
4. At the completion of the last person, the facilitator asks the group to reflect on the list and answer the questions:

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- a. What does this tell us about our team?
 - b. What do we need to keep in mind as we move forward?

Interested in learning more facilitation techniques? Check out our course, [The Effective Facilitator](#).

Michael Wilkinson is the Managing Director of Leadership Strategies – The Facilitation Company, and a much sought after trainer, facilitator and speaker. He is a Certified Master Facilitator and a Certified Professional Facilitator. As a past president of the Southeast Association of Facilitators and a board member of the National Institute of Facilitation, Michael is a national leader in the facilitation industry. You can get more tips from either of Michael's books, [The Secrets of Facilitation](#) or [The Secrets to Masterful Meetings](#). You can receive a signed copy through our website.



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