

## PARAPHRASING

### WHY

- **Paraphrasing** is a fundamental listening skill. It is the foundation for many other facilitative listening skills, including **mirroring, gathering, and drawing people out**.
- **Paraphrasing** has both a calming effect and a clarifying effect. It reassures the speaker that his or her ideas are worth listening to. And it provides the speaker with a chance to hear how his/her ideas are being heard by others.
- **Paraphrasing** is especially useful on occasions when a speaker's statements are convoluted or confusing. At such times, the paraphrase will help the speaker gauge how well his/her ideas are getting across.
- In sum, **paraphrasing** is the tool of choice for supporting people to think out loud.

### HOW

- Use your own words to say what you think the speaker said,
- If the speaker's statement is one or two sentences, use roughly the same number of words when you paraphrase it.
- If the speaker's statement is many sentences long, summarize it.
- Preface your paraphrase with a comment like one of these:

*"It sounds like what you're saying is..."*

*"This is what I'm hearing you say..."*

*"Let me see if I'm understanding you..."*

- When you have completed the paraphrase, look for the speaker's reaction. Say something like, **"Did I get it?"** Verbally or nonverbally, s/he will indicate whether or not s/he feels understood. If not, **keep asking for clarification until you understand what s/he meant.**

## MIRRORING

### WHY

- **Mirroring** captures people's exact words. It is a highly formal version of paraphrasing, in which the facilitator repeats the speaker's exact words. Some people need this degree of precision in order to feel that they are truly being heard.
- Newly-formed groups, and groups unfamiliar with using a facilitator, often benefit from the trust-building effects of **mirroring**.
- In general, the more a facilitator feels the need to establish his/her neutrality, the more frequently s/he should **mirror** rather than paraphrase.
- **Mirroring** speeds up the tempo of a slow-moving discussion. Thus it is the **tool of choice** when facilitating a brainstorming process.

### HOW

- If the speaker has said a single sentence, repeat it back verbatim.
- If the speaker has said more than one sentence, repeat back key words or phrases.
- In either case, **use their words, not your words**.
- Mirroring the speaker's words and mirroring the speaker's tone of voice are **two different things**. You want your tone of voice to remain warm and accepting, regardless of what the speaker's voice sounds like.
- Be yourself with your gestures and tone of voice; don't be wooden or phony. Remember, a key purpose of **mirroring** is **building trust**.

## STACKING

### WHY

- **Stacking** is a procedure for helping people take turns when several people want to speak at once.
- **Stacking** lets everyone know that they are, in fact, going to have their turn to speak. So instead of competing for air time, people are free to listen without distraction.
- In contrast, when people don't know when or even whether their turn will come, they can't help but vie for position. This leads to various expressions of impatience and disrespect – especially interruptions.
- When a facilitator does not stack, s/he has to privately keep track of who has spoken and who is waiting to speak. **Stacking** relieves the facilitator of this responsibility; everyone knows when his/her turn is coming.

### HOW

- **Stacking** is a four-step procedure. First, the facilitator asks those who want to speak to raise their hands. Then s/he creates a speaking order by assigning a number to each person. Third, s/he calls on people when their turn to speak arrives. Then, when the last person has spoken, the facilitator checks to see if anyone else wants to speak. If so, the facilitator does another round of **stacking**. Here's an example of each step:

**Step 1.** *"Would all those who want to speak, please raise your hands."*

**Step 2.** *"Susan, you're first. Deb, you're second. Bill, you're third."*

**Step 3.** [When Susan has finished] *"Who was second? Was it you, Deb? OK, go ahead."*

**Step 4.** [After the last person has spoken] *"Does anyone else have something to say?"*

## ENCOURAGING

### WHY

- **Encouraging** is the art of creating an opening for people to participate, without putting any one individual on the spot.
- There are times in a meeting when someone may appear to be "sitting back and letting others do all the work." This doesn't necessarily mean that they are lazy or irresponsible. Instead, it may be that they are not feeling engaged by the discussion. With a little encouragement to participate, they often discover an aspect of the topic that holds meaning for them.
- **Encouraging** is especially helpful during the early stage of a discussion, while members are still warming up. As people get more engaged, they don't need as much encouragement to participate.

### HOW

- Here are some examples of the technique of **encouraging**:
- "Who else has an idea?"
- "Is there a student's perspective on this issue?"
- "Does anyone have a 'war story' you're willing to share?"
- "A lot of women have been talking. Let's hear from the men."
- "Jim just offered us an idea that he called a 'general principle.' Can anyone give us an example of this principle in action?"
- "What was said at table two?"
- "Is this discussion raising questions for anyone?"
- "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken for awhile."

## MAKING SPACE

### WHY

- **Making space** sends the quiet person this message: "If you don't wish to talk now, that's fine. But if you would like to speak, here's an opportunity."
- Every group has some members who are highly verbal and other members who speak less frequently. When a group has a fast-paced discussion style, quiet members and slower thinkers may have trouble getting a word in edgewise.
- Some people habitually keep out of the limelight because they are afraid of being perceived as rude or competitive. Others might hold back when they're new to a group and unsure of what's acceptable and what's not. Still others keep their thoughts to themselves because they're convinced their ideas aren't "as good as" those of others. In all of these cases, people benefit from a facilitator who makes space for them to participate.

### HOW

- Keep an eye on the quiet members. Be on the lookout for body language or facial expressions that may indicate their desire to speak.
- Invite them to speak. For example, "*Was there a thought you wanted to express?*" or "*Did you want to add anything?*" or "*You look like you might be about to say something...*"
- If they decline, be gracious and move on. No one likes being put on the spot and everyone is entitled to make his/her own choice about whether and when to participate.
- If necessary, hold others off. For example, if a quiet member makes a move to peak but someone jumps in ahead say, "*Let's go one at a time. Rita, why don't you go first?*"

Note: if participation is very uneven, suggest a structured go-around to give each person a chance to speak.

## LISTENING FOR COMMON GROUND

### WHY

- **Listening for common ground** is a powerful intervention when group members are polarized. It validates the group's areas of disagreement and focuses the group on their areas of agreement.
- Many disputes contain elements of agreement. For example, civil rights activists often argue vehemently over priorities and tactics, even while they agree on broad goals. When disagreements cause the members of a group to take polarized positions, it becomes hard for people to recognize that they have **anything** in common. This isolation can sometimes be overcome when the facilitator validates both the differences in the group and the areas of common ground.
- **Listening for common ground** is also a tool for instilling hope. People who believe they are opposed on every front may discover that they share a value, a belief or a goal.

### HOW

- **Listening for common ground** is a four-step process. First, indicate that you are going to **summarize the group's differences and similarities**. Second, summarize the differences. Third, note areas of common ground. Last, check for accuracy.

**Step 1.** "Let me summarize what I'm hearing from each of you – I'm hearing a lot of differences but also some similarities."

**Step 2.** "It sounds like one group wants to leave work early during the holiday season, and the other group would prefer to take a few days of vacation."

**Step 3.** "Even so, you all seem to agree that you want **some time off** before New Year's."

**Step 4.** "Have I got it right?"

- A variation is to **highlight an area of likely agreement**. "Several of you say this plan would cost too much. Do others think so?" Look around the room for nods of confirmation. "Well, **there's something you all agree on.**"

Kaner, S. et. al., *Facilitator's Guide*  
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