

Focused Discussion: Roadblocks to Facilitation

Our Covenant Group Program is open to all members and friends of the Fellowship who are in agreement with our purpose, format, and ground rules or covenant. Most group difficulties can be solved by abiding by the covenant the group has created. However, sometime Facilitators may run into challenges that may confuse or disrupt them; we call these **roadblocks**.

Roadblock #1: Long Silences. Facilitators should resist the assumption that group members should always be sharing or there is something wrong that must be “fixed.” Not so! Consider the types of topics we address: they are designed to help us “go deeper” in our journeys. This stretch toward ultimacy sometimes requires us to think in new ways; to examine our attitudes and beliefs, and to share them with others in coherent communication. Usually, one participant will speak up after a silence. If, however, you feel like your group is drifting, ask a question from the topic that will cause listeners to think in a new way about the topic.

Example: Topic: **Inclusion.** Here are the first two questions:

1. Was there ever a time when you felt intentionally excluded by others? What happened and how did you feel about it?
2. Looking back, have you intentionally excluded others? Why?

What are some questions that might bring about deeper self-inquiry?

Roleplay #1

Roadblock #2: Low Attendance. Consistent poor attendance throws up a roadblock because a very small group will often go through the questions in a much shorter period than a larger one, leading to Facilitators trying to fill the time artificially or wondering if they should end early. Astute Facilitators will contact absent members to discuss any reasons relating to their group. One possible resolution would be to resolve the problem with individuals such that they return. For additional options, the Facilitators should bring this problem to our Facilitator’s Circle or directly to the Training and Facilitation Team for resolution, which could include:

- Asking members from other groups to switch to the low-attended one, or
- Disbanding the group and reassignment to other groups.

Roadblock #3: Overpersonalizing. Overpersonalizing means dominating time such that others do not get opportunities to share. A member who overpersonalizes presents a confusing choice: let them go on to show respect, or politely cut them short? Effective Facilitators will allow the person to share until they realize that *this person has another reason for talking* other than sharing within the covenant. In this case, Facilitators should first acknowledge to themselves what is happening. Next, they should request in a caring tone that this person see them after the session to talk more about their issue, and immediately ask another open-ended question of the group. This action *redirects* the sharing back to other members. Gentle redirection and review of the covenant is enough for most. Then, if needed after closing, the Facilitator *redirects* that person to someone who can meet the observed need such as the minister or Pastoral Care. It’s OK to remind the “oversharer” that we must allow time for everyone to have a chance to speak.

Roleplay #2

Roadblock #4: Members with Extra-Care Needs. Covenant groups are not collections of socially adept, perfectly compatible people. Remember our purposes: spiritual growth, meaningful relationships, intimacy, and ultimacy. An “extra-care” group member benefits the group by challenging us to become our best selves: respectful listeners, patient and understanding, appreciative of diversity. Facilitators must be ready to “defuse” the person’s behavior and diminish its negative effect on the group.

Suggestions:

- Remind the person of your agreements in your covenant.
- Amend the covenant to make clear expectations for extra-care needs.
- Discussion of potential resolutions in our Facilitators' Circle.
- Refer the member to our minister for a private discussion of a personal problem.
- Referral to a professional.
- Dismissal from the group if the group's health or well-being are threatened.

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