

TECHNIQUES FOR LEADING A DISCUSSION

- Give time in the beginning for a testimony or “God-sighting.”
- Read the passage (if applicable)
- Ask a launching question...with no right answer.
- Encourage different ideas.

A good question should have more than one possible answer, and each person has his or her unique perspective. Ask, “What do the rest of you think?” or “Anyone else have anything to add?” or “Is he correct, why?” or “Anyone disagree, why?” until several people have responded.
- Make people the experts.

Ask questions that relate to their experiences.
- Affirm people’s answers.

People often are reluctant to speak up unless they know you appreciate their insights. Simple words such as “Thank you for sharing that,” “That’s a great insight,” or “I hadn’t thought of that before” are enough to show people you value their comments.
- Distribute involvement during discussion.

Be aware of the quiet and the dominant personalities. Invite a person to speak by asking, “What do you think about that, Mary?” Stop others from speaking by asking, “We’ve already heard from Jeff, what do you others think?”

- Don't preach
 - When you feel that gnawing desire to "pontificate," make it a practice to wait at least 60 seconds.

- Don't take the detached stance of the scholar.
 - You're the leader. If you lean back with your cheek in your hand as you objectively weigh each thought, the conversation will be dull and halting. If, however, you model excitement, the thing might catch fire.

- Don't be afraid of silence.
 - Delay on purpose. Ask your question, then be quiet. Resist the urge to answer your own questions. Rephrase the question or clarify what you are asking until the group understands. Answering your own questions or questions that other's ask produces a group that is passive and dependent, failing to think for themselves.

- Never reject an answer, even if you think it is wrong.
 - First, understand the person's motivation, is it in ignorance or to create a faction/debate. Ask, "Which verse led you to that conclusion?" Second, throw it back to the group. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" Resist the temptation to correct too quickly. When you reject people's answers, they feel rejected as well, and they may decide it is too risky to give their opinion.

- Depart from the material.
 - Sometimes the best way to start a small group discussion is simply to ask, "Does anyone have a personal insight or revelations he'd like to share from this week's material?"

- Stay on track.

Conversation is the currency of a small group discussion. The more interchange, the healthier the “economy.” However, you need to keep your objectives in mind. If your goal is to have a meaningful experience with this material, then you should make sure the discussion is contributing to that end. It’s easy to get off on a tangent. Be prepared to interact politely and refocus the group.

- Focus on application...throughout the discussion!

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves... But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25

- Don’t Summarize the Discussion.

The purpose of the discussion is to stimulate and a summary could have a “calming effect.” You’d rather see people walk out of the room arguing, churning with things yet to say, bothered by ideas they’ve heard. Cut off the discussion while things are going well or ask if there are any other insights.