

SOME NOTES ON LEADING DISCUSSIONS

You become a good discussion leader through

- 1) A little training,
- 2) Knowing some of the basic techniques in leading discussions and,
- 3) Most important of all, getting a lot of experience in actually leading discussions.

WHAT'S THE DISCUSSION LEADER FOR? --

When people get together to discuss something their discussion very often wanders all over the place. Or they may only go as far as crying on each others shoulder about their problems and let it go at that; or one person may dominate the whole deal and he doesn't allow anyone else to contribute anything; or they may all feel a little strange and never warm up to each other; or they may want to settle the discussion by a vote.

So it takes someone with training and experience in helping them organize themselves to get the maximum out of the time they are together. That's where you come in. That's what a discussion leader is for.

To put it in a more positive way, the discussion leader generally has to do the following:

- 1) He gets the people in a group to warm up to each other and helps create a unity of purpose.
- 2) He sees that everyone has a chance to participate and helps those who may be a little backward or shy.
- 3) He guides the discussion to keep it on the problem at hand.
- 4) He helps the discussion along toward a definite end.
 - a) If people are discussing a problem, he -
 - (1) Makes sure everyone understands what the problem is.
 - (2) He helps the discussion along toward what the possible solutions are.
 - (3) Then guides them along in discussing out what specific action they have to take.

SOME TIPS WHEN YOU'RE LEADING THE DISCUSSION

If you ask a question and get no response--

Rephrase your question. If this doesn't work ask some other questions which will lead into your original question.

If they start discussing two things or ideas at the same time--

Break in and tell them the two things they are talking about. Then start discussing one of them to a conclusion - then the other.

If they wander off the subject--

Gently step in and guide the discussion back to the main question you were discussing. But, if they get off onto another question and everybody is interested in it, stay with it and help guide them to a conclusion on it. Then get back to the original topic.

Be flexible. Don't try to force the discussion exactly according to the way it is outlined in your manual or the way you have outlined it for yourself.

If more than one person speaks at the same time--

Tell them, "Let's have Joe speak first, then you and you after him."

If one person tries to dominate the discussion--

Say, "You've already given some of your ideas on this question. Some of the others haven't had a chance to express their ideas yet. Let's give them a chance, too."

If someone makes an important point--

Repeat it so that everyone gets it.

If you don't understand what someone means--

The chances are that others didn't get him either. Ask, "Can you tell us what you mean by that?"

If you're through with the discussion on a question--

Summarize the important things agreed on. Summarize what action they decided to take, if any. Also summarize what things they couldn't agree upon and where the difference is.

SETTING UP THE MEETING

- 1) Get to the meeting before time - Get the meeting place ready for use.
 - A) Arrange the chairs, if possible, so that everyone can see each other when they speak.
 - B) See that the room is comfortable and clean. If it's too hot get some air in there.
- 2) Opening the meeting up - Tell what you're going to discuss at this meeting, Don't apologize for the size of the group. Make it a success with those who show up. Best discussions take place with not less than 10 nor more than 25 participants.

- a) If it's the first meeting with that particular group and they all don't know each other too well, go around the room having each one give his name. This is a good time to urge people to speak out so they can be heard by all.

Notes based on
UPWA-AFL-CIO
instruction material

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