

# **FACILITATION: THE ART OF GUIDING A GROUP**

Dispute Resolution Institute  
Hamline University School of Law

Professor Madge S. Thorsen  
[Mthorsen1@msn.com](mailto:Mthorsen1@msn.com)  
612-247-5122

**Course Description:** Group meetings are so common in the legal and business world that often no one thinks much about how they should be conducted. Yet many meeting styles exist from top-down decision-making to majority rule to facilitation. What is facilitation? It is the art of guiding a group through a process designed to define and achieve the group's ultimate purposes. Through the use of skilled neutrals who support and encourage cooperative decision-making, facilitation is grounded on the theory that every person in a group is entitled to have a say and be a part of building consensus and that decisions so made are robust and reliable. This course will explore the theoretical underpinnings of this model of facilitation through lecture, structured role plays, exercises and group discussions. Students will also learn practical facilitation skills: ascertaining a group's purposes; structuring a meeting process to meet those ends; encouraging story-telling and dialogue; building consensus; and managing conflict. A blend of philosophy and "how to," the course is suitable for anyone interested in group dynamics.

**Course Goals:** Participants will learn and demonstrate understanding of a methodology for group facilitation; acquire and show specific skills and techniques of a facilitator; and integrate theories of group dynamics with the practicalities of running/participating in a meeting. Participants will leave the course able to lead and participate in group meetings in new and productive ways.

**Course Text:** Wilkinson, "The Secrets of Facilitation: The SMART Guide to Getting Results with Groups," Jossey-Bass (2012), ISBN: 9781118206133.

## **Course Agenda**

**January 5, 2013 (9:00 am – 4:30 pm)**

Introduction and Theories of Facilitation

What is a Facilitated Session; Models and Methods of Group Leadership (Ch. 1)

Posing Questions to a Group (Ch. 2)

Preparation for Facilitation: What are the Steps? (Ch. 3)

How to Start a Facilitation (Ch. 4)

Helping a Group Gain and Retain Focus (Ch. 5)

Notes and Recording: The Power of the Pen (Ch. 6)

Role Play and Debrief

Post Class Assignment: Send reflective email

**January 6, 2013 (9:00 am – 4:30 pm)**

Gathering Information, Prioritizing and Reporting Back (Chapter 7)

Closing a session: Review, Confirm, Evaluate (Chapter 8)

Detecting and Resolving Dysfunction (Chapter 9)

Building Consensus: How to Decide and Deciding (Chapter 10)

Secrets to Team Building: Starting with and Restoring Energy (Chapter 11)

Standardized and Customized Agendas and How to Set them (Chapter 12)

Role Play and Debrief

The Guerrilla Facilitator

Course Evaluation

Post Class Assignment: Send reflective email

**Additional Information and Assignments**

**Class assignments**

**Read text, Introduction and Chapters 1 – 12 before class begins. The reading will underlie the exercises that we do in class so you need to assimilate the material before-hand.**

Facilitate a discussion.

Each student will facilitate or co-facilitate a brief group discussion of one aspect of the material. Further instructions and assignment sheets will be sent to you two weeks before the first class. They will look something like this:

Student name:  
Student name:  
(Share your time approximately equally)  
Assignment, Day One, Morning. Be prepared to lead a 15 minute group discussion of the question in Chapter 1, "What is facilitation and when is it appropriate/not appropriate?" showing the use of brainstorming techniques.

Self-Reflective E-mail.

At the end of each session, (Saturday evening and Sunday evening) send a brief email to the instructor answering these questions: "What insight(s) did you gain from today's class that you believe will help you participate in or conduct better meetings? How?" Be thoughtful, but keep it short (no more than 200 words); don't spend more than a few minutes on it; and feel free to use first person. If you do not use email, bring in your first answer on Sunday morning and mail the second one postmarked Monday.

Contribute actively to discussions, role plays and the facilitator skill exercises that will be assigned in each segment. Preparation, attendance and participation are key to learning in any context, especially in courses designed around in-class exercises and discussion. Attendance is required at all class meetings.

### **Grades**

Grades for degree-seeking students will be based on the following elements with the designated weights:

20% Class contribution (facilitation assignment, discussion, exercises in class)

20% Self-Reflective E-mails

60% Final paper (not to exceed 2000 words). The Final Paper assignment and instructions for submission will be handed out on Sunday **AND IS DUE ON JANUARY 17, 2013 by 4:30 p.m. in printed format.**

You will be graded on: 1) thoughtfulness and creativity; 2) demonstrated acquisition of skills; 3) sound and integrative analysis of concepts; and 4) in written work, organization and good usage, punctuation, syntax, grammar, etc.

**Students should be aware of the following Hamline University School of Law Academic Rule:**

**AR-105(B) (8):** A student who does not take a scheduled examination will receive a grade of “F” for that examination, unless properly excused. **In addition, any student who does not turn in a required paper on the scheduled date will receive a grade of “F” for that paper, unless properly excused. Failure to meet any course requirement can be the basis for a final grade of “F” in the class, unless properly excused.**

**Role Play Guidelines**

Role plays provide you with experience as a meeting participant and as a meeting facilitator. Role plays allow you to experiment with new approaches and techniques without having to worry about “real world” consequences. You will benefit from the feedback and suggestions of the other participants and observers and will learn from comparing your behavior, approach and results with that of others in the class.

Guidelines for participation in role plays:

1. Take the role play seriously; what you (and other participants) get from the role play is directly related to the effort you put into it.
2. Don’t deviate too far from the scenario. If you are assigned to be a “naysayer” in a group session, then be one. But you should also respond to the productive interventions of the facilitator just as your character would in a real situation.
3. Play the role the way you think the person in the situation would play it – not necessarily as you would. Maybe in real life you are tremendously voluble, but if you are assigned to play a quiet participant, try!
4. Enjoy the role play experience!

**Instructions for Observers**

1. Please help get exercises started and stopped on time.
2. Don’t interrupt a role play except to call time or remind participants to stay in their roles.
3. Observe non-verbal, as well as verbal, communications. Take notes on what you see and hear so you can make specific reference to what transpired; i.e., did the facilitator brainstorm, make lists, etc.? Be prepared to share your observations.