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Membership Participation: 3 Leadership Tips for Greater Membership Participation During Meetings

“Our greatest strength as a human race is our ability to acknowledge our differences, our greatest weakness is our failure to embrace them”~
Judith Henderson

During meetings, membership participation is always exactly what we would like...not everyone participates fully. Here are three leadership tips you can use during your meetings to improve membership participation and hopefully your group's effectiveness. While I was in Kosovo training the heads of both public and non governmental organizations in executive leadership skills, I had a big surprise.

It is common in the United States to start off a training program by engaging the audience as early as possible. My goal for this program was to deliver as much value as I could to the attendees. Because they were from a different culture, I could only guess what they needed. In order to be fully effective, I needed to interact with them so that I could best determine what information they could use in order to help them solve their leadership and membership development problems.

I had planned to start the day-long program by asking a volunteer to write down the group's comments about challenges they had leading their respective organizations. I was very surprised when after making several requests for a volunteer and ideas for challenges, I received no response.

The problem was not language, I had an excellent translator. It was pointed out to me later that these audiences started their careers with Soviet bosses whose leadership philosophy was that staff should be seen and not heard. This group was not used to being asked their opinions and were therefore not going to give them easily. The membership participation problem with this audience was cultural.

Even in the United States one of the largest reasons for lack of membership participation is that not everyone who attends meetings feels comfortable sharing their opinions or questions. Below are three leadership tips you can use in order to facilitate maximum membership participation from all members.

Pause for comments. Westerners hate pauses. We feel the need to fill every space in the conversation. Just count the number of “ums’ and ‘uhs’ when someone speaks. These are gap fillers and add nothing to the discourse. Pauses encourage membership participation.

State at the beginning that you wish to hear from everyone. Being upfront about being open to all ideas gives permission for the quieter attendees to speak up and boosts membership participation.

Ask usually reluctant members of the group their ideas. Sometimes, it is just a matter of being directly asked before a quiet member feels safe contributing.

While I taught my Eastern European attendees about executive leadership skills, they reminded me that I (like most from the west) are a little too quick in thinking that silence is a sign to move on. I know now that pauses can be the prelude to a thoughtful comment and greater membership participation.

Do you dread your meetings even though you are the one running them? Raising the effectiveness of meetings is simple. It is just a matter of knowing how to do it. Contact me for ideas on how you can easily get greater membership participation at your meetings with just a few simple ideas. John@johnbaileyspeaker.com or by phone at 703-994-2040

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John Bailey is an internationally recognized expert who helps associations, organizations, and government agencies overcome such obstacles as leadership, change, and membership development. John does this through keynotes, seminars and personal training. He is the author of "Build Membership Mojo: 98 Proven Steps to Build, Grow, and Maintain a Thriving Membership Organization," as well as dozens of nationally-read articles.

What can John Do for you? John can be reached at John@JohnBaileySpeaker.com or (703) 994-2040

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