



July 2018

Volume 25, Number 9

Summer vacations are in full swing. Leaders and their team members are stepping away from the computer, and in many cases stepping into the sand. What impact might that have on your productivity and focus? This month's articles can provide some insight into when managers can step back and provide leeway, and when they should step in and provide extra guidance and mediation.

Safe travels!

Kristin

#### IN THIS MONTH'S **ISSUE**

- ◆ [When to Use an External Facilitator](#)
- ◆ [How Does Unlimited Vacation Days Effect Productivity? - by Joseph Sherren](#)
- ◆ [Your First Question Could Ruin a Panel Discussion](#)
- ◆ [From the Bookshelf: Attention Pays: The Four Commitments of a Winning Team](#)
- ◆ [Contact Kristin](#)

#### WHEN TO USE AN EXTERNAL FACILITATOR

While a team member can effectively perform the role of facilitator in many situations, it is often preferable to use a facilitator who is not a team member nor a member of the related functional area. This might be an "in-house" facilitator who is not associated with the team's work or an independent facilitator (like myself!)

The Sponsor and Team Leader should consider using an "outside" facilitator<sup>1</sup> when there appears to be a meeting with a high degree of:

1. **Importance.** Leading an important meeting and participating in that meeting are each sufficiently demanding to warrant having a facilitator focus on the former.
2. **Ambiguity.** When the problem is poorly defined or defined differently by multiple parties, an unbiased facilitator can listen to, analyze, and integrate everyone's views, helping to construct an integrated, shared understanding of the problem.
3. **Uniqueness.** Most teams that have developed their own patterns for addressing ordinary problems are making repeat decisions. When approaching an unusual situation, a group can benefit from a process expert to provide a fresh approach to the team's efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Sandor P. Schuman, "The Role of Facilitation in Collaborative Groups," in C. Huxham, ed., *The Search for Collaborative Advantage* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1996).

4. **Complexity.** When the issue is intricate, has lots of moving parts and/or is difficult to understand, a neutral, objective facilitator can help bring clarity to each of the parts as well as the whole.
5. **Inefficiencies.** Team members may be reluctant to attend meetings because of competing demands on their time, doubts about the amount of progress they will be able to make, or travel costs. By making each team meeting more efficient and productive, a facilitator can reduce the overall cost in terms of time.
6. **Distrust or Bias.** Team members may view the team leader or process owner as “biased” – steering the process in some way to promote his or her own agenda.
7. **Intimidation.** When team members are of disparate educational, social or economic status, are at different hierarchical levels, or are in other types of control relationships (such as purchaser-supplier or client-provider), some team members may feel intimidated and not participate.
8. **Rivalry.** Team members are typically reluctant to reveal personal rivalries or attack one another in the presence of an outsider. And, if rivalries do surface, a facilitator can determine if they are relevant to the task at hand. If they are not, the facilitator will refocus the group on its stated purpose.

## HOW DOES UNLIMITED VACATION DAYS EFFECT PRODUCTIVITY? By Joseph Sherren

Summer is almost here and organizations and employees are now seriously thinking about getting away. But, vacation is being re-defined in a way that managers could never have imagined years ago. The new policy is – “There is no policy!” Take as much vacation as you want. At first glance, this seems like a very dangerous practice. Won’t employees take advantage of you?

Statistics have shown that the answer is NO. In fact, it is just the opposite. Even now, many employees are not taking the [vacation time](#) they have earned. This is not the problem that one would expect, especially with the newer workers.

A recent [Ipsos poll](#) finds that 59 percent of Canadians aren’t sure if they’ll take a vacation. Of that, only 54 percent have vacationed in the past year and 33 percent say it’s been at least two years since their last vacation. The same poll finds that Canadians with paid vacation allowance are entitled to 21 days off, on average, but are only taking 17.

In the USA last year, workers failed to use 212 million earned vacation days. What makes this worse, these vacation days could not be carried over to subsequent years. That suggests companies were able to save almost \$62 billion in bottom line costs thanks to dedicated employees.

Many people don’t use their vacation because they are concerned about how co-workers will perceive them, even though data shows that taking time off actually makes people more productive, as well as improves their health.

Nine of the top 10 most productive countries in the [OECD](#) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 2015 were in [Europe](#) (measured by GDP per hour worked) where vacations are mandatory. The United States ranked sixth. Statistics show that Luxembourg, where people only work an average of 29 hours per week, is the most productive. Canada ranks number 18 where workers average 32.8 hours per week.

This is interesting, especially now, when many companies are dropping limits on vacation or time off. In fact, some organizations are telling employees they can take as much time off for as long as they want – but, the work must be done!

Technology and flexible working schedules have redefined how, where, and when we all do our jobs. The belief is if working nine to five, or even coming to the office, is no longer

the rule, why not be just as flexible with vacations?

An example is the [Virgin Group](#) of companies owned by Richard Branson. Employees at Branson's companies can take unlimited vacation. "Take a holiday whenever you want – as much you want. We're not going to keep track of how much time off you take," he said in a CNN interview.

Staff does not need to ask for prior approval and their managers are not expected to keep track of their days away from the office. It is left to the individual to decide if, and when, they can take an hour, a day, or a week off. The work just needs to be done.

This high-trust culture assumes that employees will only leave if their work is up to date and the team can cover for them on any urgent or unexpected situations. Of course, this also means they may be interrupted by the office while on vacation.

This new working environment dictates that the manager should focus on what people do, not on the hours or days they are physically at the office.

My question for managers:

Does your culture encourage your employees to take their full vacation without fear of judgment?

## **YOUR FIRST QUESTION COULD RUIN A PANEL DISCUSSION**

So here's the problem: Most panels start with an incredibly long, incomprehensible, multipart question directed to the first panelist. The person starts talking....and she's going to keep speaking until she is done.

It might be possible to be salvaged at this point, however, the vast majority of moderators "[hot potato](#)" the question to panelist #2 and ask for his opinion. Of course, he will answer the multi-part question. And how long is he going to speak? The exact length that panelist #1 talked, of course! Otherwise, he will feel that he is not providing as much value as panelist #1. So he goes on and on – even if he doesn't have much to add – he'll ad-lib just to keep up with the same volume.

It gets worse. So, the moderator looks at panelist #3, who is sending the visual signal of "Of course you're going to ask me." And what does the moderator say? "Of course, [panelist #3], what do you think?"

And then panelist #3 offers her opinion. What? Is she going to make it short? No! That's impossible because two speakers have already gone on and on and on and on. She will keep going the exact length that panelist #1 and #2 took, while adding no additional content.

But what happens if there are FOUR panelists? Even though the moderator might even sense that *perhaps* something has gone awry, how can he not ask the fourth panelist? All he does is recap everything the prior panelists said, and he will keep going until at long last, he's done.

The problem is that this first question has gone on for twenty to twenty-five minutes and the audience has completely checked out. They are doing the math: "We heard one question that took 20 minutes. How many questions are we going to get to in this 60-minute panel?" And at that moment, you can see it in their eyes. They have given up hope. They start wondering, how close am I to the door? Can I make a quick exit?

This is not how you want to do it. You actually want to *start fast and give them hope*.

Here's what you do, according to my good buddy and Founder of Extreme Meetings, [Brian Walter](#). "You ask a slightly less complex question and then you, as the moderator, are poised like a panther on a branch, waiting for a baby deer to walk by. You're ready to pounce the second that there is a pause and you're going to interject more of a follow-

up question. And after that, you're going to immediately go for a contrast with someone else on the panel.

Here's an example:

**BRIAN:** Connie what's the biggest financial mistake most speakers make during their first five years?

**CONNIE:** They fall for the myth that there's going to be tons of exposure, so they agreed to do something for free.

**BRIAN:** Really now, why is that? Why do they do that?

**CONNIE:** Because they're desperate and they believe that people are nice and that they're going to hire them.

**BRIAN:** Interest hinging. Tammy do you agree? You think she's crazy? What do you think?

**TAMMY:** Two separate questions but I disagree with that because I think when you're first getting started I think you should speak as often as you can to get feet on the stage so that you get better and better as a speaker.

**BRIAN:** Interesting. Sylvie, who is right? Connie or Tammy?

**SYLVIE:** None of them. None of them because it always depends. It depends on the situation you're in, your business. Do you need exposure or not? I think it depends.

**BRIAN:** David, settle this. Who's crazy, who's right?

**DAVID:** Well, I think you know speakers who don't like to sell. I always say I'd rather be salesy than broke!

WOW! How much time did that take? Fifty-two seconds. Five questions. Four panelists weighed in with four different opinions. In one minute, we've given the audience hope. They are now thinking, "That was fast moving. I wonder if it's going to be like this the whole time?"

Here's a final hint from Brian: Start fast and show that you will interject quickly when there is a micro-pause when it seems that the panelist has finished her question. Now, if Connie had said 'and...' and I cut her off, you would say 'Gosh, that guy is rude.' So, you have to make sure a thought gets finished before you jump in – but jump in you must!

It all hinges on that first question and answer. It could destroy your entire panel discussion and it becomes tough to recover. So why not start fast and give hope?

## **FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THE FOUR COMMITMENTS OF A WINNING TEAM**

Contrary to popular belief, I was not and am NOT a basketball player nor fan. I barely know the rules. Yet, as a 5'10" team management expert, I inhaled Mark Eaton's new book, [\*The Four Commitments of a Winning Team\*](#). Yes, the book is about teamwork, but it's about so much more.

So what makes this book special? Eaton is 7' 4" and was a lousy basketball player in high school. After settling for a career as an auto mechanic, he was scouted for a local college - because the coach saw potential. Potential Eaton never realized before! The book then chronicles his journey into the NBA All-Stars without going to nauseating detail about basketball and how great it was and how great he is. Rather, it's a humbling account of his journey - learning how to be a great team player and identifying four commitments you should make to yourself and to the team (hence the title):

1. Know Your Job
2. Do What You Are Asked to Do
3. Make People Look Good
4. Protect Others.

What's cool is that these four commitments aren't the usual team management drivel. They are actionable items that every team member can do today. Right Now. Immediately.

But what really shines through is Eaton's commitment to his craft. His relentless desire to improve, get better, arrive early, stay late. If you want to be an all-star, you have to practice. Put the time in. Do the hard stuff, even though you don't feel like it. I am inspired by Eaton's story!

©2018 Quality Process Consultants, Inc. | The Extraordinary Team | All Rights Reserved  
USA: 28150 N Alma School Parkway #103-615 | Scottsdale AZ 85262 | (480) 399-8489  
Canada: c/o Delta Hotel | 18 Queen Street | Charlottetown, PE C1A 8B9 | (416) 399-9223  
U.S. and Canada Toll Free: 1-800-589-4733