

6 laws of master-level facilitation.

1 be the guide, not the hero

Our role as a facilitator is to guide and empower your participants to meaningful outcomes in the most efficient and enjoyable way possible. As Yoda was the guide to Luke Skywalker in Star Wars, you are the guide to your participants in meetings and workshops. Sure, you probably have the answers to the questions they're trying to solve, but it's better to let them feel empowered to get there themselves rather than you jumping right to the end.

You're not a consultant telling people what to do (though you might nudge people here and there), you're giving people the processes, tools and structured environment to move forward. In your mind you should always be thinking of ways to make your participants the "heroes" of whatever project you're facilitating. They're presenting the big challenges, they're creating the great solutions and they're making the big decisions. You're just empowering them to do that.

avoid giving advice at all costs

If you must steer a conversation or decision then focus on sharing your experiences instead. "This is something I've seen somewhere else." vs. "I think you should do this."

highlight and celebrate individual's participation

Even small things like saying their names can help make them feel special. "As Jane said in the previous exercise, we should focus on...."

2 manage energy like it's a delicate, finite resource

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- Understand that **you only have 3 total hours of "real productivity" per day.** This is when people will be most switched on to do "heavy lifting tasks".

- **No workshop block should exceed 90 minutes.** Anything past 90 minutes can excessively drain energy.

- **Take regular 15 minute breaks** (at 90 minute intervals) and try to convince people to move

around and get some air, if possible. Try to get people to avoid working or checking emails during these breaks.

- **Don't start your workshop too early.** Especially if people are travelling to your workshop, anything before 9:30 a.m. is unnecessary.

- **Don't let workshops go on too late** either, past 6 p.m. is also out of bounds

- Make sure people always know and can **see the overall workshop agenda.** Knowing when something will end is extremely important.

- **Leave much more space in the workshop than you think.** Less is more really applies here! Workshops with more than 5 hours of "total work time" in one day are not recommended.

3 start strong, end stronger

There are two phenomena of the human brain that 90% of facilitators don't take advantage of (to their peril): One is called the Serial Position Effect, which is "the tendency of a person to recall the first and last items in a series best, and the middle items are the worst." This second is the Peak End Rule; in which "people judge an experience largely based on how they felt at its peak and at its end, rather than based on the total sum or average of every moment of the experience. The effect occurs regardless of whether the experience is pleasant or unpleasant."

In a nutshell: people are going to remember the start of the meeting or workshop, the end of the meeting or workshop and — maybe — one high peak in the middle. But that's about all you can hope for. This also means (and this has been experimentally proven), that people will rate your workshop higher if you focus on getting these "peaks" right! Start the workshop strong, end the workshop stronger and you'll run more memorable workshops than 90% of people.

4 set and get expectations

Nothing kills a workshop or meeting faster than mismanaged expectations. If your client or team are expecting one thing and they get another, then no combination of amazing workshop design and skillful facilitation will fill that gap. That gap between expectations and reality has to be closed before the workshop starts, and constantly observed during the duration.

5 beware of the curse of knowledge

We'll never forget sitting in on a design workshop at a key client's office and realizing that one of our most senior consultants couldn't explain a simple exercise. It was a disaster. We couldn't believe what we were seeing because we had personally seen this person run tons of workshops. But somehow, we'd neglected an absolute basic problem: The Curse of Knowledge.

First coined in the book *Made to Stick*, "The curse of knowledge is a cognitive bias that occurs when an individual, communicating with other individuals, unknowingly assumes that the others have the background to understand." Basically, our employee knew the exercises in so much detail and had so much practice running them that he could no longer explain them to people who were new to the topic. He simply couldn't imagine not knowing about workshops!

- As you prepare slides / boards / script, you need to work consciously on putting yourself in the 'beginner mindset'. Otherwise, your explanations of exercises will only make sense to you.

- Not only do you need to explain each exercise well, but you need to remember that participants don't see the big picture you see. To them, it may seem like a bunch of disjointed exercises unless you take the time to explain why you're doing an exercise and how it enables the next one.

- Constantly remind people of where we are in the journey between exercises. It may seem repetitive to you (the facilitator) but that's only because you know the process so well, and it'll take time to sink in for your participants.

- Don't use jargon for things you haven't explain yet like 'HMW' etc.

6 improvisation is key

A great facilitator is a master improviser. They can redesign the meeting or workshop on the fly as the goal posts move. They can completely throw out their plans and mold the experience to whatever the situation needs.

Most importantly: they've mastered the art of facilitating to the extent that none of this requires a lot of energy. It just happens. Improvisation is an absolute must for all facilitators working at Randstad Digital, even those working on more rigid workshops like the Design Sprint. Does the Demos section need to be longer? Do we need to take a walk outside to clear our heads? Will we skip the planned ideation exercise and replace it with something else? On top of that, a great facilitator needs to be able to do all of this while keeping their cool, and not making the client or team feel like they're going off track.