

Closing with Focus on Gifts

One good way to finish each meeting is to focus on the gifts and value each participant brought to the proceedings. We live in a world that is much more interested in our weaknesses and deficiencies than in our strengths and gifts. Why not institutionalize attention to strengths and capacities? At a minimum it will start a new conversation.

Here is an activity that does just that. I have ended most implementation efforts this way and it rarely disappoints. It is never comfortable, but invariably useful.

The Activity

Step 1: Back to the circle. (Optional at this point: knees nine to twelve inches from your neighbor.) The group is made up of people who have worked together in this session this day. It does not matter whether people have a long or short history with each other.

Step 2: Name the value each has brought to the session. Focusing on gifts, one person at a time, take three minutes for each person. The rest of the group states what strengths the person embodies and what value was brought to this meeting. Be specific. Not everyone has to speak, but each one has to have a full three minutes in the sun.

Step 3: Embarrassed Listening. This is a new skill you can add to active listening. When you receive feedback on your value and gifts, maintain eye contact, take a breath, and say, "Thank you. I like hearing that." It may be the most honest thing you have said all day. Then let the group know when you cannot stand it any longer by saying "next" or simply pointing if that is easier.

Despite our shyness and the discomfort we feel in talking about gifts, successful implementation comes more quickly from capitalizing on our strengths. The conversation of gifts is how this happens. This is true for an organization as well as for an individual.