

# Scott Shuster explains: Why Use a Facilitator?

There are seven solid reasons why facilitated discussion is better than a 'podium-parade' of speakers marching to the lectern for their 'moment in the sun...'

## **1. The guarantee of 100% on-point event content.**

Every time you send a speaker to the podium, you are taking an enormous risk. Will that speaker deliver the speech they said they would? Amazingly, it is not uncommon for speakers to step onstage and speak about something completely different than what was intended. Or they may speak on the right topic, but do such a poor job that their message does not come across successfully.

With an expert facilitator, you have a minute-to-minute guarantee that your management discussions will remain on-target throughout your meeting. My clients get on the phone with me weeks before their meeting to share the purpose and key messages for every portion of their gathering. I then ensure that those messages are delivered in the context of extemporaneous discussion. I do this by listening carefully to what is being said, so I am constantly and immediately aware of the tone and direction of the discussion. I draw the attention of the audience to the key messages and goals of the meeting — gently but completely guaranteeing that the words spoken from the stage fulfill the purposes of the gathering.

## **2. The all-discussion format eliminates the pre-event burden on speakers and panelists.**

Instead of spending time and effort (and in some cases, money) writing speeches and creating slides, your speakers can simply tell me what they want to talk about onstage, pack their bags and come to the conference. They need not bring anything except their brains.

You see, when you choose the all-discussion format, every presentation is a conversation. If the 'speaker' is planning to talk about things they work on every day, it comes naturally to them to 'chat' about these things. They do not require any preparation. In this instance, their only pre-conference task is to tell me what they want to talk about. I usually have a brief telephone conversation about the direction they would like the discussion to take, although often even that is not necessary.

Eliminating pre-conference tasks of speech/slide preparation can make it much easier to convince the most senior (busy) potential speakers and panelists to participate in your conferences. Even where the 'burden' of speaker preparation is not an issue, your executives will quickly realize that when they appear onstage in an all-discussion format, they get the benefit of appearing more engaging, more dynamic — more human! — when they appear in a conversation rather than in delivering a lecture. They will see for themselves how the audience pays closer attention to what they say. It is not only audiences but also speakers who benefit from the use of this format.

### **3. Assured positive positioning for every onstage participant.**

I view it as my task to make certain that everyone who appears onstage is very positively positioned as a leader/achiever/trend-setter. I accomplish this by delivering a crafted introduction of each onstage participant. I am also in a position to ensure that each discussant does a fine job onstage: Having interviewed more than 2000 persons in the 'live-onstage' setting, I know how to bring out the best in everyone. Even the most nervous panelists, unused to appearance before large audiences, will quickly appear relaxed and comfortable onstage with me.

### **4. A spirit of openness, enquiry and objectivity**

When the leader 'takes questions,' that action alone infuses your entire event with a sense of 'transparency' and 'accessibility.' My presence on your program automatically conveys to your audience that the meeting will be an 'open' sharing that welcomes new ideas and all opinions.

### **5. Audience interactivity of the highest calibre:**

At your option I can involve your audience in the onstage discussion, talk-show style. This can be handled in several ways: Audience questions submitted in writing and vetted by you in advance; microphones pre-positioned here and there around the meeting room or carried to participants; audience polling systems followed (at client option) by interview of audience members who voted in various ways. By choosing carefully among these options, full audience participation can be achieved with complete control of content and no risk of failure or embarrassment.

### **6. Reduce expenditure on room design, set-up, and audio-visual services.**

Many meetings spend enormous amounts on staging: \$75,000 to more than \$200,000 are not uncommon numbers for this budget item. By shifting toward a discussion-based format your conference can be presented within a more intimate and 'serious' environment that does not require the 'wow' factor of high-cost 'Hollywood' staging and sound systems. When the event is more focused on 'content' the 'sound, light, and emotion'-aspects can take a back seat -- at considerable savings.

### **7. The professional touch onstage.**

It's a good thing I've launched a couple businesses and have an MBA (1982, Institut pour l'E'tude des Me'thodes de Direction de l'Entreprise (IMEDE/IMD), Lausanne, Switzerland). But it's my 15-years as the leader of all BusinessWeek management events worldwide that really makes the difference in what I do. There is no one in the world who has led more senior-level management events. I am originally a broadcast professional -- the producer of "All Things Considered" at National Public Radio, and 9-years a correspondent of ABC News. It is the combination of network-level expertise in live presentation and a decade and-a-half of experience chairing management events that permit me to call myself 'a professional' onstage presence for business events.