

Discussion Pointers

to bring out the best in all participants!

Principles to keep in mind:

- I am critical of ideas, not people. I challenge and refute the ideas... but I do not indicate that I personally reject them.
- I focus on coming to the best decision possible, not on winning.
- I encourage everyone to participate.
- I listen to everyone's ideas even if I don't agree.
- I restate what someone has said if it is not clear to me.
- I first bring out all ideas and facts supporting all sides, and then I try to put them together in a way that makes sense.
- I try to understand all sides of the issue.
- I change my mind when the evidence clearly indicates that I should do so.

Discussion skills to cultivate:

- Seek the best answer rather than try to convince other people.
- Try not to let your previous ideas or prejudices interfere with your freedom of thinking.
- Speak whenever you wish (if you are not interrupting someone else, of course), even though your idea may seem incomplete.
- Practice listening by trying to formulate in your own words the point that the previous speaker made before adding your own contribution.
- Avoid disrupting the flow of thought by introducing new issues; instead wait until the present topic reaches its natural end. If you wish to introduce a new topic, warn the group that what you are about to say will address a new topic and that you are willing to wait to introduce it until people are finished commenting on the current topic.
- Stick to the subject and talk briefly.
- Avoid long stories, anecdotes, or examples.
- Give encouragement and approval to others.
- Seek out differences of opinion; they enrich the discussion.
- Be sympathetic and understanding of other people's views.

One should not express an opinion on a subject until that person has (1) indicated an understanding of the previous speaker's views by briefly restating them to the latter's satisfaction and (2) inquired whether the speaker had something further to add.