

Avoiding Facilitator Traps

By “Charlie”, SMART Online Facilitator

Expert Trap: In the "expert trap," Facilitators fall into providing direction to the member without first asking them to explain his or her own goals, direction, and plans. The problem with this approach is that members may tend to passively accept the Facilitator's suggestions and may not commit to the actual work involved.

First, ask questions as to what the member would like to seek; ask what his or her goals are in this area. Remember that REBT is goal-oriented. If the member doesn't see the purpose of the tools, and how they fit into their own goals, it is doubtful they will be compelled to do the work.

Premature Focus: This happens when a Facilitator focuses too quickly on a specific problem or aspect of a problem. Difficulties with premature focus include raising members resistance and focusing on an unimportant or secondary problem. This can be a source of frustration for the member.

Allow the members to clearly explain themselves before focusing on an issue. Many times, it is helpful to them to simply talk about the issue and clarify it for themselves.

Blaming Trap: Some new members may wish to blame others for their problems and Facilitators may feel compelled to show the member how he or she is actually at fault for the difficulties encountered. Resist this urge. Blame is irrelevant and pointing the blame back at the member may be quite demotivating. One way out of the Blame Trap is to ask, "Are you interested in who is responsible, or would you rather look at what's bothering you, and what you might be able to do about it?"

SMART-ologue Trap: This is where the Facilitator begins to try to explain every aspect of SMART with no focus on an immediate issue. Typically, this is a response to a check-in where no one offers an issue. This usually falls on deaf ears, as it can generate confusion with newcomers, rather than serving to clarify. Instead of explaining every aspect of SMART, focus on an issue such as motivation and encourage participation.

Having said that, SMART-alogues are OK in two areas however: Orientation meetings and as a last resort in crowd control, but it is best not to do this during a regular meeting.

“How May We Confuse You?” Trap: Members come to SMART to listen, observe, consider, and discuss SMART. There is no need to compare SMART to other approaches; allow the members to do any “comparison shopping” for themselves.

While SMART recognizes “multiple proven methods”, it is not really our focus to explain other approaches. The pitfalls of this Trap are that it can result in a bashing or debate session (which is typically not useful), and that it confuses the SMART approach by interjecting outside ideas and theories.

Debate Trap: This usually begins when a member hears a Facilitator make a statement that sounds like an opinion and begins to debate the issue. The way to avoid the Debate Trap is to clearly reference what you are saying, such as “*SMART says....*” or “*REBT says....*” Or “*It is my experience that....*”

Content (Advice) Trap: This is a trap when the Facilitator begins to focus on the content of what the member is saying and offers specific advice. As Facilitators, we want to focus on the process that is occurring, and not the content.

Remember: Process, not content!

It is **NOT** our place to advise people to leave their boyfriend, look for another job, etc. The purpose of a Facilitator is to assist members to learn and apply SMART tools and concepts to their own issues and goals. Any “advice” is best limited to offering it in the form of a question, such as “*What if you didn’t focus on this? Then what would happen?*” or “*Would it be possible to change your thinking on this for the next 30 days?*”

“What Did You Say?” Trap: Before focusing on the process of an issue and assisting a member to apply SMART tools and concepts, be sure that you heard what you THINK you heard. When a member has presented an issue, it is best to first offer a summary of what you believe they said and ask if you heard it correctly.

Overload Trap: This happens when you’ve done it all correctly, and the member has had an “Ah-Ha!” moment and is feeling great... and the Facilitator doesn’t stop and pushes them into overload. If the member’s immediate concern has been addressed, and they have responded positively, or have asked to move on, then move on! Any further action by the Facilitator will only have a neutral effect at best and will risk confusing the actual issue the member was concerned about with other information. Try not to overload the members with “useful information”.

Peer Support Trap: As a Peer Support group, SMART views input from all participants as tremendously valuable. Occasionally, in their efforts to be helpful, the group may inadvertently overwhelm a newer participant with suggestions and ideas. Recognize when this starts to happen, and suggest that as a group, we focus on one or two items to avoid confusing a newer participant.