FISH!® For Schools



GUIDED JOURNEY

Facilitator Tips

WELCOME BACK TO THE REASON YOU BECAME AN EDUCATOR

GUIDED JOURNEY FACILITATOR TIPS

Thank you for leading your colleagues through the Guided Journey. The program is designed to spark important conversations about the kind of school and classrooms you want to come to every day, and how The FISH! Philosophy can help you create that culture.

Each Guided Journey unit includes three basic parts:

1. First the group watches the video. In the workbook are questions you may ask the group to consider as they watch.

2. Then the group talks about the video's message, using questions and activities in the workbook to inspire discussion about how it relates to their work.

3. At the end of each unit are several action plans. They suggest strategies to try, as well as beliefs and behaviors to consider (or reconsider) as staff go through their day.

For more on the above process, read *How to Take Your Guided Journey* on page 5 of the workbook.

Of course, leading a group involves more than just following a process. How you show up for your participants makes all the difference in whether or not you create a space for productive conversations. Here are a few tips from our FISH! facilitators to help you guide your group more effectively. If you are an experienced facilitator, much of this will be review, but you may find some helpful reminders.

BE THERE

Being there for participants starts with the obvious, such as reviewing the materials and making sure the video works in your player or projection system. But it also means preparing yourself. Look at the questions not just from the standpoint of a facilitator but from that of a participant: How would you answer them, based on your own experiences? If you are prepared for the conversation, your ease will rub off on others.

Think about creating an experience that helps people be there for each other. Research confirms that having everyone facing each other, sitting in similar-sized chairs, fosters an atmosphere of more equality. If the group is larger than 15 to 20 people, think about arranging the room in tables of six to eight people for discussions and activities. Too often in large gatherings, the most confident people do all the talking while others become passive observers. Small groups make it easier for the quiet or reticent to get involved.

During the session, as the group starts to consider your questions, be patient. Trust the group and give them time to reflect. Don't worry about a little silence. Often silence gives people time to think and decide how they feel. If necessary, you can fill the silence with your thoughts. Being willing to share your own struggles or uncertainty tells others they can be honest too.

If a particular question really ignites discussion, don't feel you have to move onto the next question just to get through all of them in one session. If the conversation has energy, go with it. If you feel like the conversation is getting off track, ask a new question to bring it back. If the side issues being raised have energy, ask the group if they want to deal with those issues now or schedule another time to tackle them. This is not always an easy call. The key is to decide whether the issue being discussed is one that will ultimately benefit all of the people in the room and your students.

PLAY

There is always room for laughter even during serious discussions. Jokes and props are fine, but not if they feel forced or artificial. The first step in encouraging a playful, lighthearted atmosphere is to make sure everyone feels safe. Remind the group that we need to allow each person to finish their thoughts. Be watchful for any putdowns or sarcasm, whether it's directed at someone outside the room or inside; it can shut people down and stop an open exchange of ideas.

Lead the way by affirming every sincerely offered opinion. If there are strong disagreements in the room, acknowledge them, while always pointing the group back to the values they share—such as helping students and helping each other.

MAKE THEIR DAY

Passing out prizes and goodies (or throwing a stuffed fish) to people who participate enthusiastically is one way to make people feel good, but you may not have the budget for it. But you can make someone's day just by showing people how much you appreciate and value them.

Look for opportunities to say "great idea" or "thanks for sharing." Use people's names when they respond; it doesn't just acknowledge their answer—it acknowledges them. If someone offers a brief answer, encourage him or her by saying, "Tell us more about that." If someone shares a story about a positive experience with a student or colleague, praise them not only for what they did, but who they were "being" when they did it. If someone shares valuable insights from a mistake, recognize them for what they learned from it.

In fact, you can make an impact on your participants simply by "seeing" the best in them throughout your session. "Hold" them in your mind as valued colleagues who want to make a positive difference (even if you may not always agree with their behavior or their opinions). Over time, as they sense your belief in them, they will be more likely to pass that on to their students and coworkers.

CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE

You might wish that every session were filled with enthusiastic, sunny participants who always agree with everything you say . . . oops, cue the end of the dream sequence. The reality is that you are likely to encounter cynicism and resistance from some participants, not to mention the residue of everything they have experienced today, from disruptive students to family concerns. Plus, when you start talking about how people approach their profession, you may be challenging deeply held beliefs.

Given that reality, resistance is a sign that there are some important conversations that are waiting to be completed. That's why the worst way to deal with resistance is to resist it. Don't take it personally. You can't change the past and only they can change their minds. You can listen respectfully, invite them to share those feelings and acknowledge their position without having to agree with them. Only then can you build the trust needed to explore your differences and find common ground. (This doesn't mean letting them take over the session. If you've given them a chance to share and the negativity doesn't start to point somewhere positive, move on and invite them to talk with you later.)

Your example is the most powerful way to influence others. Are you enthusiastic, engaged, and supportive? Are you open to all points of view in the room? Are you willing to be honest—to ask and answer tough questions? Choose ahead of time to be that person, stay committed to your intentions, and no matter what you encounter, you will make a positive difference.

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