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Four Steps to Improved Group Productivity

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Cornhusker Economics

Four Steps to Improved Group Productivity

Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	4-17-19
Livestock and Products,			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	*	130.00	*
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	168.83	183.34	178.09
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	148.04	155.53	*
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	231.94	232.50	220.23
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated	62.86	81.17	81.30
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	73.91	85.88	85.26
Slaughter Lambs, woolled and shorn, 135-165 lb. National.	154.43	152.54	157.75
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	378.15	378.29	384.92
Crops,			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	4.57	3.83	4.03
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Columbus, bu.	3.79	3.44	3.71
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Columbus, bu.	9.47	7.75	7.32
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	5.94	5.36	5.83
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	2.93	3.29	3.29
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	*	*	*
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	*	123.33	112.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	*	*	90.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	161.00	133.50	121.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	49.28	46.00	47.25
* No Market			

Just ask anyone - people waste a lot of time in meetings – all kinds of meetings. The meetings could be work related, within community organizations or even within a family. They can be anywhere people get together and want to go beyond a discussion and move toward action. Groups, both large and small, often discuss important issues but many times the conversations are all over the place or they are so short that decisions are often hard to make due to the lack of clarity and focus in the discussion.

Want to change that situation? If so, here is something you might want to try. In the book, *The Art of Focused Conversation*, the editor, Brain Stanfield, shares a four step process that was developed for the Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs. The process, a series of questions, can be used in a variety of situations. In fact, the book shares 100 workplace situations where it can be used and illustrates examples of the how the four steps could be implemented in each of the 100 situations.

The Process

First, the conversation *is led or guided by a facilitator* who asks the group a series of four types of questions that takes the group from the initial discussion of a topic to a point where the discussion can move to action.

- ◆ Asking questions is a powerful tool. Some people may resist answering them but generally once someone starts, others join in.
- ◆ The facilitator also sets the stage with a prepared opening statement or introduction and concludes with a closing statement that briefly summarizes the conversation.

The questions build on each other using this four step process:

1. Level 1 – Objective questions: these set the stage and focus on the facts and realities of the situation.
2. Level 2 – Reflective questions: here the facilitator will ask for your personal reaction to the data, often trying to get the group to share emotions or feelings. Internal responses are shared.
3. Level 3 – Interpretive questions: at this step, the facilitator is trying to draw out meaning, significance and implications to the group.
4. Level 4 – Decisional questions: the facilitator tries to find a way to bring the conversation to a close with a possible action or possibly an agreement to table the idea. It can also be described as the “so what” time leading to logical next steps.

How Many Questions Do You Need at Each Level?

Typically a couple of questions are needed in each level to get adequate data (objective), pull out the pros and cons (reflective), develop some concreteness or find meaning (interpretive) and to ultimately determine what was decided and identify next steps (decisional). In addition, if you want to really move the action into implementation, you may need to ask questions that identify who is doing what and when they are doing it.

A Simple Example

Let's say you are a member of a community group ready to set some goals for the coming year. Rather than jump into the discussion you decide that a look back into the past year's work may help identify what needs to be done in the future. Here is one way, using the four steps, the process could be approached.

Welcome everyone – I am so glad to see you here today to help set our goals for next year. This is an important task. But before we jump into that discussion, I think it might be good if we look back on last year.

I would like to go around the room and have everyone contribute.

- *What have been some key events for this group? (objective)*
- *What were some important milestones for us as an organization? (objective)*

Now everyone can just jump in...

- *What was that like for us as an organization? (reflective)*
- *What was the big surprise for the group... what pleased or frustrated you most? (reflective)*

- *What did we learn from the things that went well or those things where we struggled? (interpretive)*
- *How would you describe this to or share what we accomplished this year with another person? (interpretive)*
- *From what we learned from last year, what do we want to do differently this year? (decisional)*
- *How can we put to use this experience and incorporate it into our future goals? (decisional)*

This has been a very productive discussion. I think we have all gained new perspectives and have a great start on our goals for next year.

Ready to Give It a Try?

Initially you may feel this process is a bit awkward but with practice the questions will flow easily, regardless of the situation. What have you got to lose? What you may gain is more productive and fulfilling conversations that get things done!

Reference:

Stanfield, B. (Ed.). (2000). *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace*. The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, BC, Canada.

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