

"CPR" - The Lifesaver of Ailing Groups

By Chuck Bokor

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation? We are all aware of the three letters which refer to that method of helping someone with heart trouble. Have you ever wondered how to help your group when it gets into trouble?

A few years back I belonged to a community group which I would classify as being in trouble. There was tension throughout the meetings, and afterwards, while people were getting into their cars to leave, I often overheard grumblings about the way things had just gone. The main theme of these grumblings was about the process that had just taken place, rather than about the programs, activities and purpose of the group. Everyone really believed in the cause of our group, yet something was wrong.

CPR - what do those initials have to do with groups? Nothing quite as dramatic as the original meaning, but still handy to remember if you happen to be a group chair: **C** stands for **Content**; **P** stands for **Process**; and, **R** stands for **Relationships**!

Content

What is it that the group is talking about, doing or involved with during this meeting or get-together? Do we have all the necessary facts, documents, reports, expertise, etc., to get the job done? Do we know what we are doing, or what we are talking about? (How can I as chairperson ensure a 'yes' answer to these questions?)

Process

How is the task being accomplished? Is everyone involved equally and fairly? Does everyone have input? What method of decision-making is being used? Are the creature comforts being attended to (room temperature, physical set-up, etc.).

Does the agenda allow for those who take in information best by seeing it (hand-outs, visuals)? Or does it better suit those who prefer learning by hearing it (discussion, verbal reports)? The best agenda has a balance of styles because not everyone in your group will

be good at both. And some really prefer a hands-on method as the third learning style. They don't enjoy either reading or listening, but rather working with their hands. You might try demonstrations or tours as an alternate method of sharing information in your group.

Relationships

Is there harmony in your group? Why did members join, and are their needs being met? Are the dominators and the shy people being treated equally, or are only a few people doing all the talking? How many breaks in the meeting are being allowed to give members a chance to stretch and talk with each other about something other than the task at hand?

Most organizations are very task-oriented (**content**), and pay a lot less attention to the **process** and **relationship** components of a group gathering. Our community group was guilty of this very problem. The chair was concentrating on the task to be accomplished at each meeting, trying to get through the agenda. In the meantime, only the same few people were being heard, and many were feeling left out as a result.

Here's a method of increasing the involvement of all members, helping to build both the **process** and **relationships** at the same time.

Reaching Consensus

Many meetings use Parliamentary Procedures to reach decisions. Making a motion, seconding and amending it, then voting in favour or against **can be a good way of getting through the agenda**. The people who don't know the 'rules' or who may be too timid to suggest a motion, however, may not feel very comfortable with this method.

The second problem with 'majority rule' as a way of making decisions is that if the majority is 51%, then potentially 49% of the group will not agree with the decision, and may actually resent it. There are many good reasons to use parliamentary rules of order during a meeting, but there may be a price attached.

If you use a consensus technique,

then all members are actively involved in the discussion of issues surrounding the problem. The group pools its knowledge and experience, and the final decision must be supported by each member before it is declared acceptable. When your group reaches the point where each person can say, "Well, even though it may not be exactly what I want, at least I can live with the idea and will support it," it has reached consensus.

This method of making decisions is a little slower and a little more tedious, but can work for your group under many different circumstances.

Here are some tips to help your group reach a consensus.

1. **Help** members **prepare** their position as well as possible before the problem is discussed.
2. **Listen** carefully to the views of others - be sure that their viewpoint is heard, understood and considered before moving to another.
3. **Express** your own opinion and explain it fully, so that the rest of the group has the benefit of your thinking.
4. **Explore** the views of as many members as possible, and give everyone a chance to be heard.
5. **Look** for a most acceptable solution - everyone should come out a winner; there should be no losers.
6. **Deal** with conflict from a positive point of view. If the members of the group are willing to disagree, it means that the group is committed to the task; and the group is able to test how good the idea is and ensure that many possibilities are being heard.
7. **Do not use** conflict reducing techniques, such as voting or negotiation, as tempting as these methods might be, to break a stalemate.

Pack this method of reaching consensus away in your kit bag for future use; it may be just the CPR your group needs!

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