



Navigating Facilitation Challenges

Total time: 11min 54sec

Meg Foster 00:01

Thank you for listening to the short recording which is part of a larger audio series to help explore prevention, developing and expanding our prevention efforts, and troubleshooting challenges in our prevention efforts. In this recording, we discuss common challenges that we may experience while facilitating prevention work, and brainstorm some strategies to navigate these challenges. Today we are joined by Sexual Assault Task Force staff.

Kate Hildebrandt 00:23

I'm Kate Hildebrandt, Campus Coordinator.

Carli Rohner 00:25

And I'm Carli Rohner, Campus Advocate Coordinator.

Meg Foster 00:28

And I'm Megan Foster, the Prevention Program Coordinator. The challenges we are going to discuss were identified by participants in the statewide comprehensive prevention training in 2018 and 2019. Let's begin by discussing challenges related to our own facilitation. One of the first challenges we want to talk about is setting boundaries as a facilitator.

Kate Hildebrandt 00:48

Yeah, so when we were thinking about this, one of the first things that came to mind was the real importance of setting up expectations at the beginning. When we think about setting boundaries in presenting or in facilitating, it's important to set things up at the beginning to set the norms, have expectations for the room, go over those, maybe generate those as a group. So you have, you and all the participants know what's going on. I think it's also important even before that, to have a good roadmap of, what are your learning outcomes? What is your goal? So you can really centralize and stick to those, I think, especially when participants maybe try to take you in a different direction, or when the organization you're working with is asking for different things. If you'd agreed upon learning outcomes, or you've agreed upon this is what the goal of this is, then you can always fall back on that.

Alright, so the next thing that we wanted to talk about was challenges related to, as facilitators, when we might take up too much space. For example, when we might fall back on lecturing versus actual facilitating.

Carli Rohner 01:55

I think one of the ways that we can look at this is two-pronged. So the first part is looking at how comfortable we are up in front of a room and if that over-facilitating or us as presenters taking up too



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much space is coming in, because we're nervous about trying other types of activities, or other modes of delivering that information in a room. And so I really encourage for folks to one, do dry run throughs get up in front of a room or get up in front of coworkers and have them give you feedback about how much time you're spending on particular topics, how much facilitation you're doing, does it feel like too much to watch as a participant, and then incorporate that feedback into your presentation before you get up in front of your actual audience.

The other area that I think can be really helpful is being really intentional ahead of time about what activities and the mapping of your presentation is going to look like. And so for example, one of the things that I like to do is sketch out usually on a piece of paper, here's the learning outcomes, like Kate talked about, that I want to incorporate, and then how am I going to deliver those. So if I have more than 30 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the audience of time where I'm just up in front of the room talking, then I'll try and either insert a break, or a group activity or something where participants pair with another person at their table and talk, just to give folks a break from hearing my voice at the beginning of the room. And so that's just two strategies, working with your coworkers to kind of make sure that the amount of time you're up in front of the room talking isn't too much. And then incorporating different activities at the beginning when you do those outlines can be really helpful.

When we're looking at some of these challenges, another one that came up for us was folks having minimal or lacking a little bit of experience talking in front of folks that can be really scary and what does that look like when we're trying to be comfortable with material and responding to questions or the unknowns that come up in a room.

Meg Foster 03:55

I know for me, I'm always more nervous when I'm doing a presentation for the first time or doing some sort of activity for the first time because I don't necessarily know what kind of questions are going to come up or how it will land with participants. So like Carli said, figuring out opportunities to practice, whether it's presenting in front of your colleagues or other groups that you work with, that can be really helpful. I also think that thinking through some of those hard questions that you've gotten in the past, while you're not in front of people, is really valuable. I think that a lot of times we get asked these questions and then we kind of pause and are like, "that's over there now, I don't need to deal with that anymore." But if you actually sit with that and think about what are your answers to that in open, honest and authentic ways, that can be really beneficial. I also think it's important to note that modeling navigating complexities in our work, modeling those tough questions, modeling not having all the answers is a really valuable prevention skill. And so we as facilitators have the opportunity to really demonstrate what it looks like to be human, not have all the answers, not know everything. But these are the skills that we can utilize to find answers and these are the skills that we can utilize to make decisions. So I think we're in a really unique opportunity to do that. I also think exposing yourself to a lot of different curricula, a lot of different presenters, whether that's going to trainings or other places can help improve this as well. This kind of goes along with another challenge that I think a lot of us continue to experience no matter how long we've been doing this work, but really questioning our own ability and education in this work.

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Kate Hildebrandt 05:49

I think it's really easy in prevention to experience a lot of imposter syndrome or to feel like you don't know what you're doing. Partially because a lot of us come from really different backgrounds. So we might come from a Public Health background or community-based organization background, you might have been involved in this when you were in high school or in college, you might have been an activist formerly. And so chances are that a lot of people who are doing this, no one really has the same exact training or the same exact disciplines. So therefore, it's really easy for us to feel like, well, this person knows more than me, or I don't know everything that I need to know, because there's so much to know. So I think the first thing about this is that no one is alone who feels this. I know, I've felt this, I think we have all felt imposter syndrome where like, we don't really know, everything that we need to know, we question our own abilities. So just know that that's normalized.

I also think the nature of prevention work is that it makes us question everything and that it's so interconnected to so many of the other things that we do. You know, for example, we know that you can't talk about preventing sexual violence without talking about privilege and oppression and the root causes of violence and there's so much to know within that and it's so interconnected to all of these other systems and structures. And so I think the overwhelming nature of it just lends that to itself anyway. But I also encourage folks to view that as an opportunity, that it's really exciting that we get to keep learning things as we progress in our careers and prevention, or even as we go on to do other things that are still passionate about prevention work. I think this is probably true of every career, but for me, it's been especially true in this one that it's really important to acknowledge that I don't know everything and that I need to keep learning. And I would only really get concerned if I ever felt like I did know everything and could stop learning because that's probably never true. There's always more to learn. So I'd encourage you to just embrace and lean into that. And I think what Meg was talking about a minute ago of acknowledging that you don't know everything, and so you don't need to have the answer to every question. You don't need to be an expert on every single topic that's going to come up from somebody in one of your trainings. You can continue to learn with them and you can continue to go do your own research and expand your own knowledge, go to trainings, all of that. And I think that that's a really important part of again, modeling that in the work. And just knowing that, you know enough and you know enough to say what you don't know. And I think that in and of itself is probably all you need.

Carli Rohner 08:19

And this brings up a really good point. Kate, I think, when we're talking about how folks can feel comfortable and some of that imposter syndrome. Sometimes we're partnering with folks across the community to either go into their spaces to prevent or to present information, or having them come into ours. And one of the challenges that folks talked about that comes up for them is presenting information in those partners' settings, but then sometimes they'll also either knowingly, or unknowingly contradict the messaging or training that you're providing for folks. And so what are some of the ways that folks can operate when that comes up for them?

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Kate Hildebrandt 08:52

Yeah, I think that's a huge challenge for a lot of people especially because if you're going into, you know, a community organization or school or a residence hall or wherever you're presenting, you probably have very little idea about what's going on the rest of the time, and you can't be there to control it or to really hear what other messages are being given. I know when I was on college campuses, I always thought about this with what our students and professors are saying in the classroom, what are the other things that they're getting all the time. There are a couple strategies that I've used in the past that I think can help with this, although, of course, acknowledging that because we can't control everything that sometimes this just happens. But one of those is I think it's really important to do a lot of rapport building and community building ahead of time before presenting, if possible, to kind of build those relationships with the people who have leadership in those organizations or in those groups to make sure that they are on the same page or that they at least understand what you're doing. I know sometimes the nature of our programs doesn't lend to a ton of time to do that, but if possible I think having meetings with administrators or with the leaders of whoever you're working and kind of talking with them about your goals, getting them on board, establishing some common values and kind of helping them along in their prevention understanding too or working together to expand all of your own prevention understanding, I think that can do a lot to do that.

The other thing is empowering participants to understand and to call those things out or to question those. Again, I know when I was working in middle and high schools, I think I saw a lot of especially there was a particular group of middle school students that I was working with, that really saw a lot of that, they started to call out, as we went on in our sessions of well, I'm hearing you say this, and we talked about this, it makes a lot of sense. And my teachers say this, my peers say this and so helping them just feel empowered to question that and to hold multiple truths in their own mind or to even take action on things that they see are really problematic in what's going on in their own organizations. So I think that can also be a really helpful thing. Because again, you're empowering, creating the next generation of preventionists, or people who are going to expand this work.

Meg Foster 11:11

We are just some of the people who have some ideas about how to navigate these challenges; we expect that a lot of you listening also have some great ideas. So if any of you want to share those with us, please feel free to reach out via email or phone, we would love to hear from you. And please check out the other recordings and the series to think more about some of the other challenges we're experiencing. Thank you all.



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