

Teaching Through Leading Discussion

Week 4 Teacher's Notes

Responding During Discussion (Continued)

8. When someone shares a good point, we need a collection of possible responses. A leader who simply says "that's a good point" is not necessarily advancing the discussion. Try to assess how to acknowledge and appreciate the point, summarize the point, while at the same time deciding whether to do one of the following (this takes fast thinking on your feet):

Ask for a further distinction or relationship between the point just shared and something else said earlier: "Is what you're saying the same as what Pam said or different?" "How would you distinguish between this and what the faith-healers teach?"

Refine or clarify the point: "I don't think you're saying this are you?" "So do you think this 'turning the cheek' also applies to governments?"

Ask for exceptions to the point: "Are there any cases you can think of where this wouldn't apply?"

Ask for further implications of the point: "I think this might apply in some other areas too. Can anyone think of examples?" Ask for qualifications to the point: "This is a good point, but can anyone think of a qualification we should add?"

9. The typical pattern for group lessons is a series of points made by the leader, interspersed with periods of discussion. Breaking out of discussion and back into lecture is usually very natural after fielding a comment:

"Thanks! That was very well-said. Now I'd like us to look at verse 5 for a minute."

Good, that really puts a point on it. Now let's look at a related point."

10. If they have skipped points, say, "Let's finish up on that point before we go on. . ." Or "I still didn't hear how we are supposed to understand sowing and reaping in light of grace"
11. Don't assume new, unexpected directions are bad. Ask yourself whether they have potential and whether you have time. If the group is excited about the new direction, you may want to go with it.

Ending Discussion

1. Don't wait until everyone is worn out and refusing to talk. Keep your eye on the clock and end on time. Time passes faster during discussion than under other formats.
2. If people are still discussing excitedly, you may delay a bit, but warn them that "we need to wrap it up soon."
3. Ask "Are there any final thoughts before we tie this all together?" Then, give a short summary and final thought or challenge before moving to prayer.
4. Be sure to use some energy for this part.
You may want to refer to a point or two _____ earlier, naming them
Consider thanking your group for their participation (but this could also be done one-on-one afterward)
5. When teachers give a summary of discussion, research shows it will appear in students' notes and will be remembered.

Infusing Energy into Discussion

What makes a discussion exciting and energetic?

1. Content
 - "Content per minute" has to be properly paced. Too little content per minute makes people feel like they are being patronized, as obvious points are repeated or belabored in an unenlightening way. Too much content per minute leads to confusion. We believe too much content is better than too little. We would rather have people challenged than bored.
 - Content that is provocative, either of previous assumptions, or of listeners' lifestyles, tends to be stimulating. But use tact and care, because while insulting people may be interesting and create feelings, we will not usually win the day this way.
 - Content that is new and unknown to listeners may cause excitement, but only if we can show them why they would benefit from learning something new, or why it is simply interesting. Also, new content must be backed up with convincing evidence, because people are more suspicious of new content.
 - Some content is simply not that interesting. Ask yourself, "Would I be interested in this subject if I wasn't teaching?" If not, you have to be creative enough to make it interesting, or edit it out. Some truths are uninteresting because they don't seem to apply or tie in with other knowledge. We have tried to show you how to use thesis-antithesis thinking to make otherwise dry content interesting. Likewise, strong illustrations, personal sharing, and applying as you go can all make content interesting.
2. Leader pathos -- Study the [outline on authoritative speaking](#) In addition:
 - Pathos is feeling. The truth is important and should be served up with some feeling-- otherwise we are sending mixed signals. "This is the most important truth in the world, but it doesn't move me to raise my voice."

- To create feeling, the speaker should actually feel. When we let ourselves feel the urgency of our message, we are said to have a "burden" for the material. We develop a burden through prayer and wrestling with accusation and apathy during the days before we teach. This is a good reason to avoid waiting until the day before to prepare. Sometimes, our burden has to be taken on faith, in the sense that we won't actually feel the zeal until we actually step up to speak.
- Leader inhibition causes us to want to be "cool" when teaching, and not risk being viewed as foolish. While extreme or corny displays would be considered foolish, most of us are in NO DANGER of suffering this fate! Video taping your teaching will confirm that most of us are much more reserved and inhibited than we think.
- Consider the components of strong emotional communication:
 1. **Voice** - emotion is noticeable in the way we speak. An even, calm tone suggests a lack of emotion. Strong emotional speech is variable -- The tone of our voice should rise and fall in volume and in pitch. Also, emotional speech is generally louder (unless expressing grief or similar). Try going extreme in pitch and volume once in awhile on key points. Learn to throw the hardball, but save it for key points. Also, unusual ways of bending words, speaking with staccato gaps, repetition of phrases, and exaggerated, slow or fast speech all attract waning attention and arouse curiosity. Again, the important thing is not to throw all hardballs, but to vary our approach. Intense fury is most impacting when juxtaposed with happiness, humor, appeals, or sorrow. Throwing any pitch too often becomes either boring, or even annoying.
 2. **Face** - Research confirms that much of what we communicate emotionally is transmitted through the face. When teaching, especially a home church or cell, you are easily close enough to people for them to get a good look at your face. Think about people who are emotional. How does their emotional state affect their faces? Faces that are screwed up in agony, faces with huge, happy smiles, faces that are solicitous or sympathetic, faces that are disturbed or suspicious, all help to convey strong pathos. A deadpan face suggest lack of interest and perfunctory discussion, unmoved by the subject. What a terrible mistake to communicate God's word that way!
 3. **Body language** - When people are emotional, you can tell from their body language. Unemotional people are stationary, calm, and relaxed. Emotional people become agitated and their body movements become pronounced. The head may begin to bob or jerk with our speech, punctuating phrases. The head may tilt to one side or rear back, as if in refusal. Our hands may gesture furiously, including broad sweeping movements when we are truly upset. Emotional people may bang their fists on the table. They may lean closer to the listener. They may become agitated enough to stand up and pace. They may point their finger directly at the face of the listener. They may act out with their arms what they are talking about. They may wrap their arms around themselves protectively. The possibilities are endless and should be matched appropriately to the situation. Again, wild gesturing and movement

can be exciting, but only if limited to key situations and points. If we begin to act this way all the time, it becomes phony and annoying.

4. **Eyes** - Regardless of what emotion we are communicating, speech experts warn us that we must make direct eye-contact with our hearers. Inexperienced speakers often tend to look down at their notes, thus momentarily breaking the rapport they have established with their hearers, and calling attention to the fact that this is a planned teaching, rather than a spontaneous act of communication--exactly what we *don't* want. Limit looking at your notes as much as possible. Two or three times should be enough for a whole teaching, because you are only checking to see if you left anything out. Inexperienced speakers also tend to stare just over the heads of the audience, or just below them at the floor. This helps the speaker to concentrate without distraction, but either of these would earn an "F" in speech class because they both suggest disengagement with the audience. Instead, learn to slide your eyes across the audience from person to person, looking directly into their eyes.
5. **Group participation** - People are generally stimulated when others chime in. People like to interact with their peers and hear others' viewpoints, or ways of expressing the same point. As discussion leaders, we are in a unique position to draw on this avenue for pathos. As discussed earlier, when people begin to discuss, learn to goad them on to further exertion. When someone is emotional in their sharing or comments, be sure to encourage them.

If your group is being fed with good content, and stimulated by strong pathos, you have both heat and light. Such teaching have the power to impact people in a lasting way.