

Round table hosting guidelines

It is important for Round Table Sessions to be successful that speakers take a time to prepare, to ensure attendees leave with at least a few valuable takeaways.

Of course, the hope is always that you have people at the table who immediately engage in discussion, but that cannot be certain. Here we set out a few notes that you may find useful in preparing for your session.

Audience

Members of the Association have a wide array of knowledge – most attending the sessions want to learn, so don't be afraid to get back to basics; even the pro's can do with a reminder at times. The smart presenter will attempt to cover sound fundamentals with some original or contentious thoughts.

Objectives

It's good to see that speakers submitting details, published on the DCA web site, have already set out their outline objectives. The next stage is to turn each point into a list of sound-bite deliverables – the nuggets that become takeaways.

Structure

Be clear how you want your session to develop.

At the outset –

- Introduce yourself and explain why you are a host
- after very brief introductions round the table,
- set out how you will run the session and what you want to achieve,
- signposting the key points you will cover to act as a basis for discussion,
- reassuring everyone to ask questions or comment at any time.

Take each point you are covering, re-signpost it and –

- highlight the key issue(s)
- any potential pitfall(s)
- and the benefit(s)
- hopefully, interspersed with an odd anecdote.

Time, you will find, is not on your side, so get to the point quickly. You are going to be talking for the most part; you need to cover the subject matter you promised; yet you have little idea how discussions will develop. As a guide, presenting the issues for discussion is likely to take you no more than half the time, leaving the other half or more for discussion. But it all depends on the



audience engaging in discussion. If the attendees are not asking questions of you - be ready to ask questions of them – “Is that your experience / how do you do it at the ABC Company”? That’s why it’s a good idea to note names and companies on a table plan at introductions.

Relax - you are in control – and audiences in the main are both somewhat submissive to your requests and wanting you to succeed.

Danger Zones

If you have a few knowledgeable attendees it’s all too easy to become involved in an ‘expert debate’. Don’t. Remember – your primary purpose is to share experiences with and between everyone at the table, so that they all benefit from the debate.

If someone is labouring a point, suggest you talk about it after the session, particularly if you are running short on time.

Do not be too rigid in your presentation - you need structure, you’ve decided what you are going to cover, what the takeaways are, now you need get a measure of those round the table and take things up or down a gear to meet their overall needs as a group – that’s why those introductions are important. Asking a quick question as attendees introduce themselves can be a real eye-opener for the level at which you pitch.

Visual Aids

DCA grouped round table sessions tend to be crowded places: sound levels in the room can rise and it can be difficult at times to hear others round the table. If you use any printed material, which does help audience focus, make sure everybody can clearly see it; those beside you, when everyone is huddled around the table, and those across the table too.

Notes

And finally, to make sure your audience is assured those valuable takeaways provide them with a series of bullet-pointed notes. Supplier hosts, in particular, may prefer to offer to email them to allow contact details to be acquired.

Good Luck on the Day!