

Life Changing Courses

BUILD & LEAD SOUGHT AFTER PROGRAMS THAT CREATE GLOWING FANS

Best Practices for Facilitating the Chat on a Group Call

What is the Purpose of the Chat?

There are good uses and not-so-good uses of the chat function when it comes to group programming. Masterful facilitators are clear on how they want the chat to be used for the benefit of the group. Without being intentional, the chat can end up in a place where people get distracted, overwhelmed, or offended/triggered.

Some of the best purposes of/times to use the chat function for group programs:

- Similar to Breakout Rooms & Group Shares, one of the most valuable purposes of the chat is for it to be a place for the community to get strengthened via people connecting with each other, having a space to share and express, having a place to give validation and witness and be witnessed.
- The chat is a great place to start to warm people up to sharing at the beginning of a program, retreat, or session. Asking a simple welcome question to be answered in the chat can get people more engaged as well as connecting with each other.
- When you ask the group a question, and you want to give people an opportunity to share, I always like to hear some voice-to-voice shares, but it is also really valuable for people to answer in the chat – especially if you're short on time or want to hear from many people in the group or track where the group is at.
- The chat is also a great place for participants to ask questions for the facilitator or others to respond to.
- Some people might feel too shy/not in the mood to raise their hands to share or ask a question, but they are willing to write it out in the chat.
- If I am not using slides (I most often am not), sometimes like to use the chat to copy and paste journaling questions I've asked or instructions I've given or to list out the main

points of things I've shared. For people who need a visual, this can be helpful (as well as resource sheets).

- And then of course, the chat can sometimes be a wonderful place for people to share their thoughts and ideas as they are engaging with the session.

Best Practices for the Chat

There are a couple of things that are tricky about the chat, and you want to address this in your facilitation.

1. The chat is a much looser part of the container than facilitated voice-to-voice shares. What I mean by this is that the facilitator can't lead or manage the chat in the same way that they can manage a voice-to-voice share. Because of that, you want to be aware that group members may be more likely to share things in the chat that are inappropriate or offensive (most often not on purpose, but inadvertently!). Letting people know best practices for voice-to-voice shares as well as chat shares, can really help with this. (We'll learn more about this in our Facilitation Retreat).
2. Especially for people whose nervous systems are more sensitive, the chat can sometimes be distracting and overwhelming, particularly if a lot of people are posting a lot of comments. Always let people know the chat is "optional" and that if it is overwhelming for them to post there or to be reading while also engaging/listening to what happening on the video, to just ignore it and come back to it after class.
3. There may be certain instances in your session when it is appropriate to close the chat: moments where it is really important for everyone in the circle to be fully focused on what's happening in the "main room." For example, I sometimes turn off the chat function during a coaching practicum so that the volunteer coach and the volunteer client can have everyone's full attention. I may also turn the chat off if I'm going to discuss something important that I want shares to be voice to voice only.
4. As a facilitator, I find it challenging sometimes to be teaching/leading/facilitating AND to be following the chat at the same time. I don't get to read everything as it is being shared, and sometimes I miss things that are shared in the chat. I let people know upfront about this challenge and that my main focus is on teaching and engaging voice to voice, and that if I miss something in the chat that someone wants me to comment on, to raise their hand with it.

Sometimes someone will share something – a question or response – that seems important to respond to, but I don't quite understand what they've said. I will ask them for voice-to-voice clarification.