

Table Leaders' Responsibilities

- Relate to and accept the candidates as they are.
- Help keep the discussions on track.
- Help stay on schedule by responding promptly to the bell.
- Make sure everyone from your table family is where they need to be at specific times.

The Table Family

To facilitate a spirit of sharing, promote an attitude of community and open the door of friendship, the candidates are assigned to small table groups for which team members are responsible. These groups are service communities. In them the candidates not only summarize the talks but also dialogue on the message proclaimed in each talk, so that by in-depth sharing of the Christian experience, the weekend may help bring about a progressively mature conversion.

The groups help create an atmosphere in which the candidates can speak with openness, verbalizing their concerns, exchanging ideas and sharing experiences with each other.

On the first day, the group is simply a working team. Almost certainly by the end of the Cursillo it will be a community of faith and love.

Role of the Team Member

As the Leaders Manual points out, each person who comes to Cursillo is unique, with personal circumstances substantially different from those of others. Hopefully, all will become an integral part of the Cursillo weekend experience. The Cursillo leader must respect this uniqueness in his/her personal contact and group tasks on the weekend.

The primary role of a Cursillo leader is one of personal contact with the group of participants for which he/she is responsible. The secondary role is to be a leader at his/her table. The team members at each table should lead by example in taking notes and participating in the discussion.

Group Discussion

A good discussion leader raises questions, keeps the discussion moving on track, and relates the remarks of the participants to each other, to the talk and to previous discussions and talks.

The team members help move discussion along. One of the purposes of discussion is to ensure that the main points of the talks have been grasped. An effective leader knows the main points of each of the Cursillo talks and understands their relationship to one another in order. If an important element is being overlooked in the discussion, the team member should bring it out.

The basic objective is to let each individual express his/her point of view and to produce a summary of the talks for presentation at the poster party.

Posters

Posters need not be works of art; rather their purpose is to graphically represent the message of the day's talks—another way to get the main points across to the candidates and to be sure they've grasped them. The Cursillo team member guides the process so the candidates are not as concerned about the creative process as to overlook the message. Your duty is not to have the best poster, but to ensure that your group has understood the message. This is a good opportunity for the Cursillo leader to recap the main points of the talks, string the ideas together and end with the daily message—hopefully stimulating ideas to portray it on paper!

Chapel Visits

One table leader begins the visit with spontaneous prayer (a prayer of Thanksgiving); when everyone in the group has had an opportunity to pray aloud, the remaining team member closes the visit with a summary prayer. Eloquence is not important; short, simply prayer from the heart is truly authentic.

(Based on directives from the National Cursillo Center in Texas)

Conference Room Techniques

Group discussion is an effective way to stimulate people with a common interest to share views and gain insights. To achieve this objective, here are a few pointers to remember:

1. One person should speak at a time.
2. Everyone should have an opportunity to speak.
3. Encourage the art of listening.
4. Stick to the subject matter.
5. Don't argue.
6. Try to understand everyone's point of view.
7. Do not allow yourself or anyone else in the group to be an "expert" or teacher.
8. Finish on time.

A good discussion leader raises questions, keeps the discussion moving on track and relates the remarks of various participants to each other, to the talk and to previous discussions and talks.

Remember, the basic objective of the table's discussions are:

1. To get each individual's point of view.
2. To produce a summary of the talks for the table presentation at the poster party.

One of the purposes of the group discussion is to ensure that the main points of the talk have been grasped. An effective leader will understand the main points of each of the Cursillo talks and their progressive linkage, and be able to move things along when discussion gets bogged down.

The discussions at the table help build community among the participants, but they also facilitate the educational process. Therefore, the Cursillo leader will occasionally reiterate the main points and underscore them from his/her own experience. If a candidate has difficulty understanding any of the points being made, the leader can use free time to deal with him/her on a one-to-one rather than take group discussion time to focus on the one person's problem.

Characteristics of a group that you should be aware of:

1. Most people are willing to speak in a group because there is less chance of being held accountable than if addressed individually.
2. Group participants do not respond well to a dictatorial or stubborn leader.
3. Group members who feel inferior are more likely to be negative and resist integration.
4. People react constructively when they do not fear negative criticism.
5. All need to feel appreciated and valued and want to be accepted for what they would like to be, not only for what they really are.

How Groups Develop

Table leaders should be aware of the process of growth that occurs in groups.

Polite Stage

In this stage people tend to avoid controversy and serious discussion, so they can be comfortable with each other.

Purpose Stage

When people start asking "What are we supposed to be doing?" it is a sign of progression. Questions about the purpose of the poster or of the summary, for example, are normal.

Power Stage

This phase occurs when members feel they need to have more influence over the life and procedure of the group. It is not an attack on authority, but rather recognition that the participants feel the need and have the right to control activity in a constructive manner.

Constructive Stage

This stage is marked by members working well together, listening to and dialoguing with each other. They show mutual respect, trust and support for each other. It is a mature stage of development.

Spirit Stage

This reveals a strong loyalty to the group. Morale is high and the participants take great pride in their group. The group's attempts at originality in table summary and poster presentation reinforces this.

Points of reference:

1. Be aware of and deal with each individual member of the group constructively.
2. Recognize the stage the group is in and meet its needs.
3. Allow the discussion to proceed without intervention as long as it is going well.
4. Set a good example by taking notes, participating with sincerity, awareness and openness.

The other members will pattern their actions on yours.

Dealing with Difficulties

All groups have their share of some general types of people. The leader needs to recognize these types and, working with the other table leader, have a strategy for dealing with them.

Problem: The person who frequently is off on his/her own tangent.

Solution: After listening and affirming, take the first opportunity to say, "That is an interesting point you raise. Could we take it up at another time? Right now we have to concentrate on ..."

Problem: The person who rambles on about old experiences, irrelevant matters, etc.

Solution: Intervene when he/she stops for a breath. Express thanks for the contribution, rephrase the last statements and turn quickly to other members with a question on the topic. Or briefly give your own response to the matter and get things back to normal. (Ramblers are often persistent, so this strategy will have to be repeated.)

Problem: The person who uses a poor choice of words or has difficulty expressing him/herself.

Solution: Rephrase what the person says by saying: "Let's see, you are saying that ..."

Problem: The person who does not participate or is shy.

Solution: Between discussions, let the person know how much you appreciate his/her presence and how you think he/she can make a valuable contribution to the group. Draw out the individual by addressing him/her from time to time during the discussion and affirm the person between sessions.

Problem: The person who argues all the time.

Solution: Recognize the person's legitimate objections; involve him/her by asking for clarification, and support whatever insights are offered. Often, the more attention you pay, the less negative the person becomes. Sometimes you can make an ally of the person by asking him/her to help you draw out the shy person in the group.

Problem: The person who talks too much.

Solution: When he/she pauses, intervene with "That is worth reflecting on –I'd like to comment on that." Then invite another person to comment. Do not ignore the talkative one, but control his/her contributions to enable others to share in the discussion.

Problem: The person who always asks the leader for an opinion before the discussion gets underway.

Solution: Redirect the question to the group.

Problem: The person who holds side conversations with other members of the group.

Solution: Look at him/her and sincerely say, "(Name) I didn't hear what you said. Do you wish to share it with the group?" If this is done repeatedly by the leaders, the message is given that side conversations are unacceptable.