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Colorado State College  
Fort Collins, Colorado

STATE COLLEGE OF  
FORT COLLINS, COLORADO  
D-7

EXAMINED AND CHECKLISTED

# DISCUSSION GROUPS

Today's Topic:  
FOOD FOR FREEDOM

*What is Needed ?  
Where Produce it ?  
Who Should and How  
Produce it ?*



FREE DISCUSSION IS A PRIVILEGE

ONLY IN A DEMOCRACY

**COLORADO STATE COLLEGE**

**EXTENSION SERVICE**

**F. A. ANDERSON, DIRECTOR**

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# DISCUSSION GROUPS

## Some Suggestions for Discussion-Group Leaders

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### Methods of Imparting Information at Meetings

1. **Lecture.**—A “one-man discussion,” speech, address, sermon. Useful as a teaching device when others do not have the information or experience. Size of group of no consequence.

2. **Debate.**—Speeches by two to six individuals presenting the pros and cons regarding a certain topic or question. Useful before large groups in balancing the facts and opinions in order that the audience may be intelligently informed.

3. **Panel.**—A group of four to twelve selected individuals who have usually been forewarned and, therefore, have had time to assemble facts and organize their thinking in order to discuss quickly the topic intelligently before a larger group.

4. **The Demonstration.**—One or more individuals present a method of doing things such as meat cutting, poultry culling, cheese making, etc., for the information of the entire group.

5. **The discussion group in which everybody is given an opportunity to express an opinion.** Adapted only for smaller groups.

6. **Brief Lecture—Discussion combination** in which a program, regulations, or suggestions are explained in a brief period, then the group interprets and determines the local application through discussion procedure.

The fundamental objective of discussion groups: **“Men are most likely to settle a question rightly when they discuss it freely in the light of facts, opinions, and experiences which they have.”**

A discussion may lead to:

1. A group conclusion or majority opinion.
2. The presentation of facts, experiences, and opinions of members of the group with no attempt at group agreement, each individual being left to make a more intelligent decision later.

## Some Observations Concerning Group Discussions

1. It is surprising how **small** the amount of information a **single individual can supply** compared with that which can be contributed by a group of 20 or 30 people.

2. In the lecture, debate, panel, or demonstration, individuals in the audience may go into mental dormancy (sleep), **but they all must stay awake in the discussion group** because they know that each will be expected to contribute and it is essential that the expressions of others be followed. Each individual in a discussion group **must think** or suffer the consequences of probable ridicule or embarrassment. (This is the greatest advantage of the group discussion compared with other types of meetings.)

3. Fundamentally, men as well as women like to express themselves. To an individual the most successful type of meeting is one in which he has been permitted to express himself—"unload something off of his chest."

4. Group discussion is not adapted to large groups. Eight to thirty individuals provide enough experiences and opinions to be representative of the community.

5. In the baseball or football score pool or "pot," **one** individual takes away the entire pool. In the discussion group, **everybody** may take away the information that has been pooled.

6. Discussion is not a quick way to arrive at conclusions since, when working at its best, it provides for consideration and evaluation of all views and does not stop at one that may seem best at the moment.

7. Discussion is not a method to be used in presenting indisputable facts, though it may be very helpful in interpreting and applying such facts to local situations.

8. The discussion group is a modern adaptation of the assemblies around the stove at the country store or the C. S. A. (corner sun absorbers), where talk, shavings, and tobacco juice flowed freely. Modern discussion is not a haphazard, aimless procedure which can be substituted for all the other educational methods, nor is it one that members of groups can engage in without some thought and preparation.

### Preparation for the Group Discussion

The topic can be obtained in two ways:

1. Suggested by some outside agency, or determined by a program committee, or some individual.

2. Let the group pick the topics for the present and future discussions as in regular meetings of community-planning committees.

The questions or topics selected must provide an honest difference of opinion. They must provoke thought, be alive, vital, and of interest to the entire group. Information concerning the topic or experiences relating to the question must be available to members of the group.

### Preparation by the Leader

1. The leader must understand the topic in order that he may clearly define or explain it to the group.

2. The leader must understand the objectives to be reached in the discussion meetings. In the language of a college professor, "The leader must know **where** in the 'ell he's going, and **how** in the 'ell he's gon'er get there."

3. **The development of a logical, progressive list of questions is the leader's best preparation.** A simple question or two to start 'em talking, then gradually feed out the tough ones and watch the group pounce upon them like a group of hungry dogs after a bone. It's best to keep the list of questions hidden and let them appear extemporaneously. Some leaders are smart enough to pick out good questions as the discussion progresses. Better develop a few before the meeting.

4. The leader **does not** need to know **all** about the topic. Some think that the best leaders are those who **know nothing** about the topic in question. One thing is certain—a good leader is one who is only **one** member of the group, and he **does not** try to answer all of the questions.

5. The question of inviting persons who are known to have facts or pertinent information on the topic to sit in with the group is often a problem of preparation for leaders. More facts may help the group to arrive at an intelligent decision, but such facts should be presented as a basis for interpretation and application by the group. Did you ever notice how quickly some one who **knows**, can stop an argument?

6. A few simple details are very important to the success of the group discussion as follows: Arrange the group in a circle so that all eyes can see every speaker's face. Make everyone comfortable by checking ventilation, heat, and lighting. Also provide ash trays, blackboard, chalk, and eraser, pencils, and sheets of paper for each. A cup of good coffee on cold nights before the discussion begins helps to loosen tongues.

## The Discussion in Action

1. Begin on time and quit on time.
2. See that everybody knows everyone else. Let each give his first and surname. Emphasize that everyone is to take part, that all should remain seated, and that "speeches" must be held to 3 minutes or less.
3. Appoint a blackboard secretary, or the leader may act as secretary, to put a few important words or phrases on the board for emphasis or for aids in the summary. At planning meetings this recorded discussion is valuable for permanent records, and a complete condensed record of the discussion should be kept.
4. The discussion should bounce from member to member like a rubber ball rather than from leader to group member and back to leader. Frequently the discussion leader may need to allot time, recognize individuals, or caution "now one at a time" when 3 or 4 members of the group try to speak at once.
5. Keeping the discussion upon the topic, the "speech maker" (uncontrollable gasser), and the member who won't talk are the three most difficult problems for discussion leaders.

- a. The leader can best keep the discussion on the subject by an occasional summary of the questions or points covered. He may need to interrupt with the statement, "Now gentlemen! I believe we are wandering away from our topic for the evening. We have discussed this and this and have arrived at this question\_\_\_\_\_." I'm sure there are some more opinions on this."

The group can be reminded of the topic and the leader may need to throw out another leading question or introduce new facts, ideas or opinions known to be available in the group in order to hasten the return to the topic.

- b. Interrupting the "speech maker" is the best procedure, such as "Now just a minute. Let's hear from others on this point." "Did I understand you to say\_\_\_\_\_?" and give a faulty interpretation, referring the interpretation to some other member of the group. Look at your watch and "Remember, 3 minutes!" Sometimes just a plain "Whoa," smile, and "We can't keep up with you," will work. It is much better if some member of the group rather than the leader interrupts the speech maker.

An argument between two members can frequently be stopped by appointing a third man as a referee or stop the

argument by requesting a clarification of the points of argument by each.

c. The man who came only to listen may be definitely called upon by some other member of the group or the leader as "Charley Smith told me that he thinks\_\_\_\_\_." What do you think of that, Mr.\_\_\_\_\_?" or "Your opinion on this, Mr.\_\_\_\_\_, I'm sure will help us."

6. The leader or the secretary should summarize the discussion, indicating points of agreement and the questions not yet solved, thereby opening the way for a selection of topics for the next discussion. The topic, time, place, and discussion leader for the next meeting should be decided upon before adjournment.

### **Six Ways to Make People Like You\***

1. Become genuinely interested in other people.
2. Smile!
3. Remember that a person's name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
4. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
5. Talk in terms of the other person's interest.
6. Make the other person feel important—and do it sincerely.

### **One Dozen Ways to Win People to Your Way of Thinking\***

1. The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.
2. Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never tell a person he is wrong.
3. If you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.
4. Begin in a friendly way.
5. Get the other person saying "Yes, yes" immediately.
6. Let the other person do a great deal of the talking.
7. Let the other person feel that the idea is his.
8. Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view.

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\*How to Win Friends and Influence People, Dale Carnegie.

9. Be sympathetic with the other person's ideas and desires.
10. Appeal to the nobler motives.
11. Dramatize your ideas.
12. Throw down a challenge.

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