Notes from the Chair: The facilitation habit most people skip



Participants make up their minds about a facilitator quickly. Before the first exercise, and before anyone has seen your agenda design or your favorite tool, they've already decided whether you're someone they can trust with their time and their honesty.

That's the heart of **Presence**, the first of INIFAC's six facilitation competencies. When INIFAC built its competency model from a global survey of more than 450 facilitators and clients, Presence came first, and I think of it as the foundation for the rest. Everything else works better when the room believes you are really there.

Presence is often confused with charisma or a commanding delivery. INIFAC defines it through five observable behaviors:

- **Confidence** in your skills and your ability to lead the group
- **Warmth and caring**, so the group can tell you want them to succeed
- **Energy** that you choose deliberately to suit the audience and the topic

- **Adaptability** in your style and language for the group in front of you
- **Self-awareness** of your own strengths and weaknesses

Notice what isn't on the list: volume, charisma, polish. A quiet facilitator can show all five. A dynamic one can miss most of them.

Of the five, self-awareness is the one facilitators most often leave out of their development. We practice techniques and build toolkits, but we rarely stop to name the few habits that help us and the few that get in our way. For years, I was uncomfortable with silence. When a question was met with quiet, I assumed I had asked a bad one. Now I use silence on purpose, because it gives people time to think, especially the more reflective people in the room.

One simple way to start: after your next session, ask a trusted participant or co-facilitator, ***"When did I seem most like myself, and when did I seem least?"*** The answer is often more useful than any feedback form.

With great respect for all you do for your clients, colleagues, and our profession,

Diana Mastel Gurwicz
Chair of the Board
INIFAC – Institute for International Facilitation



In this month's *From the Chair*, I share a story from early in my career about a group I was warned "didn't talk," what was actually happening in that room, and how it changed the way I opened the session. I've also included two more practical steps you can try.

Read Blog



Every facilitator knows ***that*** room.

The arms are crossed. Someone is clearly answering emails. Two people in the back are having their own conversation. And when you ask a question, you get nothing but silence.

Tough rooms happen for lots of reasons. People were sent there without being asked. They've sat through too many sessions that wasted their time. They're skeptical of the topic, or of change itself. Most of the time, it isn't about you.

But how you respond is entirely about you.

Facilitators with strong presence don't panic when the room pushes back. They stay steady, get curious about what's going on, and find ways to bring people back in without forcing it.

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