

CHAPTER 4

USING FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

INTRODUCTION

The skills involved in being a leader include integrating a *facilitative approach* into every aspect of your work. In the broadest sense, a facilitative approach includes supporting staff so that they are able and motivated to perform well. The most important part of a facilitative leader's role is to *enable* staff to use the QI process, to meet the needs of clients, and to implement institutional goals to provide quality EmOC.

Throughout this manual, how your style of leadership can affect the QI process is emphasized. This chapter discusses specific leadership and communication skills that will help you lead the QI process in a facilitative, constructive, and effective way. The first two parts of the chapter provide some general tips about facilitative leadership and communication skills; the third part discusses how to apply these skills in conducting the participatory meetings so critical to the QI process.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Figure 18: Key to Facilitative Leadership

- Emphasize vision for EmOC services
- Lead by example
- Be well informed and prepared
- Delegate appropriately
- Encourage ownership
- Work effectively with groups
- Mediate conflict
- Reinforce the positive, and show enthusiasm
- Remain flexible

Emphasize Vision and Goals of Emergency Obstetric Care

As the team leader, your ability to express and emphasize your facility's vision for EmOC is one of the most powerful ways to motivate staff. If you are excited about what the future could hold for your facility and if you are optimistic about the staff's ability to achieve that future, sharing this with staff will inspire them to follow you toward that goal. A staff that is excited about this vision will be more willing to go through a process of change in order to achieve it. You can also present some of the overall strategies and tools available for getting there, such as those for QI, so that staff will feel more confident that they can achieve their own goals and overall vision for EmOC services at the facility.

Communicating the vision of quality EmOC services at your facility does not have to involve big speeches at formal occasions. You can express it in many ways:

- Through group exercises in which the EmOC team envisions what their service would look like if it were a “model” for other facilities or services
- During orientation for new staff, emphasizing the vision of EmOC service at the facility
- In team meetings and individual supervision, during discussions of specific work issues
- In a vision statement for official documents, proposals, IEC materials, etc.
- In your support of team decisions and behavior that put the vision and goals into action

Lead by Example

Being a role model is one of the best ways to demonstrate your commitment to the team’s goals. By using good communication skills, demonstrating appropriate work values, and following correct standards and practices, you show by example that everyone must act on the vision of quality EmOC services.

Below are some ways you can lead by example:

- Treat **all** clients and staff with respect.
- Stop what you are doing to attend to urgent client needs immediately.
- Share in the workload of others.
- Put values into action (e.g., if a clean environment is valued, pick up trash you spot in the corridor).
- Respect people’s time: Arrive at work and meetings on time.
- Do not waste materials and supplies.

Be Well Prepared

You cannot expect people to follow you if you are not sure where you are going or what you are doing. Become expert in the skills, QI tools, and problem-solving methodologies that you will be transferring to the staff. Always be prepared for meetings and interventions.

Delegate

When you assign the task of making decisions or overseeing a project to someone else, you demonstrate trust in the staff and your sincere interest in providing opportunities to develop their leadership qualities. Being given responsibility can be very motivating, so delegate where appropriate.

Delegating responsibility and tasks appropriately demonstrates:

- *Good organization:* You have been thoughtful about which tasks should be delegated and which ones should remain with you.
- *Individual accountability to the team effort:* Staff learn how to manage the task themselves and problem solve with you in order to accomplish it.
- *Your role as team leader:* You retain ultimate responsibility for the final product by following up or supervising the team member implementing a task. Delegating does not mean abdicating your role in leading the QI process.

Encourage Ownership

The QI process is designed to enable staff to take ownership of the quality of their work. One of the most important features of the QI process, for example, is its emphasis on team-led assessments. Team members carry out the assessment, developing solutions and problem-solving processes themselves in order to improve the quality of services for *their clients* and to ensure the most effective working environment for *themselves*. Ownership will come about only when staff begin to see that their efforts are making a difference and if the messages coming from the team leader support the process. You should take every opportunity, both in group settings and in one-on-one encounters, to encourage ownership by modeling openness to new ideas and flexibility as staff suggest changes and implement improvements.

Work Effectively with Groups

The skills needed for working effectively with groups—how to create a nonthreatening environment, run participatory meetings, and encourage problem solving through open dialogue—are central to making group interactions a productive and effective vehicle for the QI process. Successful group facilitation helps staff to identify as a team and, thus, is a central skill for a team leader to use.

Mediate Conflict

Conflicts among team members may occur from time to time during the QI process, and you may be asked to “solve” them. As the team leader, your goal is to promote problem solving among team members; so, in general, it is wise to encourage them to take the first steps themselves in resolving conflicts before coming to you. You can model a positive approach to problem solving by following some of the suggestions below:

- If a team member comes to you about a difficulty he or she is having with a colleague, your first question should be: “Have you spoken with him or her about this?” If the individual has not, strongly encourage him or her to do so and follow up later to see if the effort was successful.
- One mediation strategy is not to discuss conflicts unless everyone involved in the problem is present in the room. This avoids a situation of “splitting,” in which each team member can try to get you, as “the boss,” to agree with his or her point of view.
- You can agree to mediate a particular issue yourself if the team member’s effort does not work. This means helping two people to talk with each other, following the rules of respect and confidentiality.

Reinforce the Positive and Show Enthusiasm

Look for opportunities for improvement, rather than laying blame for poor performance. When successes happen, make sure staff become aware of them. Create opportunities, such as during staff meetings, to share the feelings of accomplishment, to recognize staff who have done well, and to reinforce the idea that the staff created the success themselves.

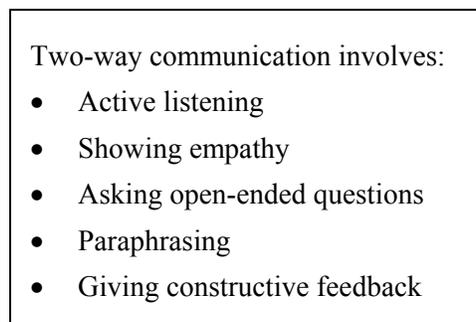
Likewise, demonstrate your enthusiasm for the process. The QI process depends on the staff’s enthusiasm; by your showing enthusiasm, it will be easier for team members to get excited and to stay excited, even if improvements in quality are slow in coming.

Remain Flexible

Facilitative leadership demands flexibility: The QI process plainly involves change, and change means trying out new strategies and procedures and adapting to new circumstances. You are also encouraged to be flexible with the QI approach itself. For example, since every health care facility has different needs, strengths, and weaknesses, some of the questions in the QI tools may need to be adapted to better suit the needs at your facility. Every time you use the tools will be a different experience because you may have new staff involved, the problems you are facing may have changed, or the external environment may be different. It is your job to lead staff in accommodating these changes. Also, you are modeling that flexibility can lead to innovation and further improvements.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Figure 19: Communication Skills for Leaders



The way you communicate sends a strong message about your style of leadership and how you view the staff. Through words and body language, you convey how you see your role as leader: either as inspector and critic or as facilitator, consultant, guide, and team member. In the same way, you communicate your view of staff as either subordinates whose job it is to do as you say without question or dialogue or as colleagues with good questions, opinions, and ideas that can contribute to improving the quality of care. To establish trust and a spirit of cooperation between you and staff, communication must be *two-way*.

One-way communication involves giving commands and orders or asking closed questions, ones that can be answered with just “yes” or “no.” In one-way communication, one person does not feel truly involved in the interaction. *Two-way communication*, on the other hand, involves dialogue—the equal sharing of opinions and ideas. To achieve good two-way communication, you may need to develop a set of skills different from those you are used to. For some people, many of these skills come naturally, yet all of them can be learned. With practice, you can use many of these skills to promote participation and ownership among staff.

Two-way communication involves a combination of the skills discussed below, including active listening, showing empathy, asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing, and giving constructive feedback (Figure 19).

Active Listening

Active listening is listening to another person in a way that communicates understanding, interest, and empathy. It is not the same as merely hearing. Active listening requires energy, skill, and commitment. By using active listening, you acknowledge the speaker and demonstrate that his or her ideas are important. Consider some of the do's and don'ts of active listening (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Active Listening Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentrate on what the speaker is saying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do other things (e.g., look through papers when the speaker is talking) Daydream or get distracted by surrounding events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow the speaker to express himself or herself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interrupt Finish the speaker's sentences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow the speaker to control the conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask questions that change the subject
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept the speaker's opinion as valid for himself or herself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rebut, criticize, or judge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pay attention not only to words but also to gestures and behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipate what the speaker is going to say next Ignore the emotional context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent emotions from inhibiting active listening no matter what the speaker is saying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become angry, defensive, or upset

Source: Adapted from Harper and Harper, 1996.

Active listening also involves nonverbal behavior or body language. Active listeners should be careful to use culturally appropriate body language to indicate respect, interest, and empathy. In many Western cultures, for example, looking people in the eye and leaning toward them with an open posture (arms and legs uncrossed) indicates attention to what they are saying, but such actions are considered impolite in other cultures. Also, body language may have a different meaning depending upon whether one is in a group or communicating one-on-one. So, when you are communicating with staff, it is important to be aware of your own body language and to understand which behaviors may promote or hinder active listening.

Active listening also involves *verbal and nonverbal cues* of encouragement: the words, phrases, or gestures that show attention and the wish for the person to continue speaking. Examples of verbal encouragement include such phrases as: "I see," "That's clear," or "Uh-huh." Examples of nonverbal encouragement might include nodding your head, mirroring the speaker's facial expression (e.g., smiling when the speaker smiles and frowning when the speaker frowns), and reacting emotively to what the speaker is saying (e.g., showing concern, support, or agreement through your facial expression).

You may be an active listener already, using many of these techniques intuitively. If, however, some of them are new, try practicing them. This style might feel a little unnatural at first, but

eventually, you will use it easily, giving the message to the speaker that you are listening and understanding.

Showing Empathy

Show that you understand how staff feel about a situation when they express their views. This helps them feel like part of the group and helps them share feelings and ideas. Empathy statements can start with: “I can understand that it must be difficult to ...” or “I understand this is a difficult problem for you ...” Using empathy statements can help to:

- *Acknowledge strong emotions:* For example, when someone is showing anger, you can begin a reply with: “I can see that you’re upset.”
- *Encourage people to listen:* If staff feel that you genuinely recognize their emotions, they are more likely to listen to what you and other staff say.
- *Relieve anxiety about discussing a problem publicly:* For example, you can say: “I can understand why it would be very difficult for you to do effective infection prevention if you always run out of cleaning solution by the end of the week.”
- *Help someone express emotions:* For example, you can say: “It sounds as if you feel very strongly about this issue” or “It sounds as if you have had problems dealing with this before.”

Asking Open-Ended Questions: What, Where, How, Why

An important way to foster two-way communication is to use open-ended questions. Open-ended questions usually begin with “what,” “where,” “how,” or “why.” They encourage staff members to participate because to answer them, speakers have to think and respond at some length—the questions cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Open-ended questions can be used to:

- *Start a discussion:* For example: “What do you think about infection prevention practices in this clinic?”
- *Get a member of the team more involved:* For example: “Nurse Obare, what is your opinion about infection prevention practices in the clinic?”
- *Bring a conversation back on track:* For example: “What other information do we need to solve this problem?”

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing helps clarify what was said and demonstrates your understanding of the speaker’s message. Paraphrasing can be introduced with: “So, in other words ...,” “It sounds like...,” or “Let me make sure I’ve got this right.” Using this technique will help you to:

- *Clarify what someone is saying:* For example: “It sounds as if you think we are spending too much time discussing infection prevention.”
- *Resolve conflicts between participants:* For example: “It sounds as if Dr. Ndeté thinks that our infection prevention procedures are adequate, and Nurse Obare thinks there is still some room for improvement.”
- *Get at deeper issues:* Some things are hard to speak about. By paraphrasing, the facilitator can help participants talk about the real root cause of the problem by using such statements as: “In other words, there is more to this problem than meets the eye. Nurse Kouame says the emergency drugs are often out of stock, so she feels she needs to keep expired doses in the kit while waiting for new supplies.”

- *Demonstrate understanding*: “This is what I understood you to mean. Am I right?” (Then proceed to summarize the speaker’s statement.)
- *Reinforce timid participants*: “Thank you, Mrs. Perez. What she is suggesting is to post the duty roster over the sink rather than on the bulletin board in the matron’s office.”

Giving Constructive Feedback

As a team leader, you will often need to discuss with staff your views on their performance or on how they are implementing QI. Another term for this is providing *feedback*. Feedback is most effective if it is:

- Positive: Pointing out strengths, progress, accomplishments
- Constructive: Identifying gaps, focusing on finding solutions and indicating what to do differently

When performance is good and the quality of services is high, you as the team leader should continually find ways to acknowledge and praise staff. Congratulations on a job well done are always in order, and reinforcing the positive motivates staff to continue with the same standard of performance.

However, there are circumstances when performance needs to be improved. By using *constructive feedback*, you can clearly communicate what needs to be changed without being overly critical or punitive. Simply telling someone what he or she is doing wrong is ineffective if your goal is to improve performance over the long term and to help solve problems. Criticism without true two-way communication can result in excuses; cause hurt feelings, depression, or anger; decrease confidence and self-esteem; and cause the employee to avoid you and/or work. In the end, it does not help solve the problem of poor performance because the staff member does not feel heard and often is not clear on what to do correctly.

Constructive feedback is the best way to achieve your goals. Constructive feedback focuses on joint problem solving and solutions, avoids blame, and uses two-way communication skills, such as active listening and asking open-ended questions, to arrive at a clear understanding of the problem. Its intent is to support staff in improving their performance. Nevertheless, there will be occasions when the staff under your leadership will not respond to constructive feedback. Being a facilitative team leader does not mean that you never have the option of reprimanding staff who refuse to cooperate or are intentionally negligent in the performance of their work. Reprimanding is appropriate for a staff person who is unwilling to make the effort to improve.

Consider the following when providing feedback to staff:

- *Choose appropriate timing and place*: Choose a moment when you think the person is ready to listen. Avoid times when the person is busy, tired, or upset. Do not give feedback in public, or the employee is likely to feel overly defensive or humiliated. Also, avoid waiting too long or the impact will be weakened.
- *Convey your positive intent*: This requires some preparation: If you cannot think of the positive outcome you want, do not give the feedback. Begin with a neutral statement like: “I have some thoughts about ...,” “Let’s take a look at ...,” “I’d like to discuss...”
- *Point to a common goal*: This helps the person understand the importance of the feedback and encourages team spirit. Use “we” when stating the problem in order to highlight your

common goal. For example: “Mr. Lopez, we need to facilitate clients’ access to the clinical team as quickly as possible. I have observed that some clients are unable to get to the emergency area because there is often no one there to direct them.”

- *Describe specifically what you have observed:* Focus on the behavior or action, not on the person. Avoid “you” statements: Instead of “You did a poor job preparing those reports,” say: “The reports were incomplete.” Avoid commenting on the person’s character: Instead of “If you weren’t so lazy, you would be able to meet the deadline,” say: “Frequently these reports are not submitted on time.” Be specific, brief, and to the point. Point out what the person is doing well and then describe (or demonstrate) what he or she can change to improve. As much as possible, limit feedback to one behavior or issue; covering many topics at once can be overwhelming and lead to a defensive response from the person.
- *State the impact of the behavior or action:* Link the undesired behavior or action to client satisfaction/outcomes or program goals. For example: “If clients have to wait for directions to the maternity ward, their health is being put at even greater risk,” or “If the client log is not completed in time for the next shift, it slows up the response time of the incoming staff since they will not have the background on what is already happened; this compromises continuity of care.”
- *Ask the other person to respond:* Invite a response. For example: “What do you think about what I’ve said?,” “What is your view of the situation?,” “How do you see things?”
- *Focus the discussion on solutions:* Clarify your expectations and offer advice, training, and coaching. Explore solutions jointly and choose ones that are realistic. Agree to meet back after a set interval of time to discuss the staff member’s progress and other issues that may arise in the interim.

Listen attentively, use appropriate body language, incorporate active-listening techniques to encourage open dialogue, and set a tone that makes mutual problem solving possible.

APPLYING FACILITATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN CONDUCTING PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS

In order for staff to work together effectively as a team on improving quality, it is important to provide opportunities to meet and discuss ideas, acknowledge successes, discuss problems, and make joint decisions about how to move forward. The emphasis of the QI approach is teams working together. Your job, therefore, as a team leader will be easier and more effective if you can learn how to harness the energy of group work to drive the QI process at your facility. This section discusses meetings as a QI management strategy, how to organize them, and which leadership and communication skills are useful.

What Meetings Can Accomplish

Much decision making and action planning can be done more effectively in meetings than done individually. By engaging staff collectively in information sharing, problem solving, and service recognition, your daily “crisis intervention” will be greatly reduced, and you and the team can concentrate better on quality service delivery. Specifically, meetings with staff members are opportunities to:

- *Inform:* Much inefficiency in work is caused by lack of information. Use meetings to review protocols and procedures, discuss responsibilities, report progress and changes, etc., with a large number of staff.

- *Find solutions:* Hear ideas for solutions from all levels of staff. Show how what seems to be a small problem in one area can cause delays or problems throughout the EmOC service. Discuss issues before they become problems.
- *Recognize:* Show people that their work is noticed. Have the doctor who handled an emergency well present at case review, the head sister report tracking statistics on emergency drugs, or the head of the blood bank explain the procedure for filling blood requests in the middle of the night.

Regularly scheduled staff meetings are usually the best forum for conducting many of the activities in the QI process. Staff meetings should be held at least monthly, and *every* meeting should include:

- A brief case review
- A follow-up on the action plan

Other items for the agenda could be updates on standards or guidelines, reports of monthly statistics or tracking indicators, news from the Ministry of Health, or reports from other departments in the hospital or facility.

In addition to these meetings, from time to time, when a more complex issue needs to be addressed, such as conducting a death audit or reviewing findings from the annual EmOC assessment, for which new problems/issues must be added into the action plan, you will need to hold an additional meeting. The timeline (see Chapter 3) shows the pattern various meetings might take in a facility using the QI process.

Planning Meetings

When planning a meeting, whether routine or for a specific event, you should always take into account its purpose and the desired outcomes. Having your eye on the goals of the meeting will help you decide whom to invite and how to focus participation. Consider the following when planning successful meetings:

- Determine the purpose and desired outcome of the meeting.
- Develop an agenda that states:
 - The purpose or the objectives of the meeting
 - The beginning and ending times for the meeting and the time assigned for each topic
 - The location of the meeting
 - A list of participants or departments to be represented (if possible)
 - The items that will be covered
 - Who is responsible for each item
- Distribute and/or post the agenda in advance of the meeting.
- Ensure that those responsible for presenting each item know what is expected of them, have what they need to make their presentation, and know how much time is allotted for the presentation.
- Identify who should be present at the meeting. If the purpose of your meeting is to ensure that all staff have updated knowledge about service-delivery issues, changes in protocol, or the results of a QI activity, you will involve all staff. If the meeting is about a specific topic, you will identify who needs to participate and ensure that they come. Not everybody needs to be included in every meeting.

- Assign responsibility for taking notes of decisions or actions agreed upon.
- Ensure that decisions made and actions agreed upon are followed up in a timely fashion and, when appropriate, that you report back to those involved in the meeting when they have been accomplished.
- Have minutes written of the meeting and posted/distributed to meeting participants and to those absent.

Timing

Choose a time for the meeting when it is least likely to interrupt the services at the facility. If clients usually come early in the morning and are gone by lunchtime, hold your meetings in the afternoon. Make sure services are covered and that those covering know where you and staff will be in case of an emergency. The staff will participate more enthusiastically if they see you have done everything possible when scheduling a meeting to minimize any delays in services or inconvenience to clients or themselves.

Location

If you have a choice of venue for meetings, select one with the appropriate physical environment. Team members need to feel comfortable in order to participate fully in meetings. If they are uncomfortable, they may not pay attention, may try to leave early, and may not interact well. In choosing a meeting place, pay attention to the physical elements:

- Temperature and ventilation (consider heating, air conditioning, fans, open windows, etc.)
- Lighting (not too dark, not too bright)
- Noise (choose a place without distractions)
- Seating (make sure there are enough chairs: no one should be standing)

Lastly, pick a location where all team members should feel at ease (e.g., junior staff might feel uncomfortable meeting in the director's office).

Seating Arrangements

Where people sit in a meeting has a great deal to do with their level of comfort and the degree to which they participate in meeting discussions and decisions. Since the QI working groups include staff from all levels, strive for seating arrangements that suit the size and purpose of your meeting and foster a feeling of equality. For example, people sitting across from each other tend to interact more with each other, basically because of accessibility. Here are possible seating arrangements:

- Theater: Where there is a head table or dais and participants are seated in rows of seats facing the head table
- Classroom: Where there is a head table or dais and participants are seated at tables in rows facing the head table
- Hollow square/rectangle: Where all participants are seated facing each other around tables arranged in a square or oblong with a hollow in the middle
- Round: Where all participants sit in a circle or around a circular table
- Small-table groups: Where all participants are seated at a series of small tables spread around the room
- U-shaped tables: Where participants are seated around the outside of tables arranged in a U-shape

The last three types of seating arrangements are preferable for group discussions and interactions, largely because no position is dominant and all members of the group can see one another. If you must use a room with fixed seating, such as an auditorium, you will need to rely on group facilitation techniques and other meeting processes to ensure that all staff have a voice. See the section below for suggestions.

Encouraging Participation

- Although you may do all you can in a meeting to encourage staff to participate, sometimes you might want to have an informal conversation outside the meeting with an individual staff member who is reluctant to speak in a group.
- Prior to the meeting, help staff make efficient, to-the-point presentations when reporting on some aspect of the QI process.

Conducting Participatory Meetings

Running truly participatory meetings may be challenging at first. The medical hierarchy inside the facility will shape participation, as well as social hierarchies formed by gender, class, ethnicity, and religion. Since hierarchy is ingrained in every society, new behaviors must be learned so that everyone present at QI meetings can feel comfortable contributing their ideas to the discussion, thus becoming an active group member.

Your job in conducting QI meetings is to help EmOC team members adopt new ways of interacting with each other. For example, you may be more accustomed to giving orders than working as a team member. Nevertheless, over time, group successes will be the best teacher. As the team works together to confront and solve problems, they will see the benefit of ideas coming from a diverse group of people and will be encouraged to see some of their ideas put into action.

Specifically, you should learn to:

- Empower others, especially in decision making and problem solving
- Encourage discussion rather than give orders
- Ask questions rather than presume you have the answer
- Listen to others' opinions with an open mind
- Believe that everyone can have good ideas

Likewise, the team members may be used to taking orders or avoiding scrutiny. To participate equally in QI, they should learn to:

- Share their opinions in group settings, even when superiors are present
- Take responsibility for their actions
- Express their feelings and be open to those of others
- Ask for what they need
- Negotiate support for their opinions

You can help the staff learn and use these new behaviors through participatory meeting procedures, modeling the behaviors yourself, and coaching others who try. Here are some suggestions:

Meeting Procedure

- Use seating arrangements to mix staff levels (see discussion of seating arrangements above). If chairs cannot be arranged effectively, you might try assigning seats initially.
- Use warm-up exercises, such as having staff greet or introduce the person sitting next to them.
- Stick to time limits on the agenda, so that there is time for discussion after reports are made.
- As much as possible, ask a range of staff to make reports.
- Set ground rules from the outset that foster respect, such as arriving on time, no interrupting or side conversations, and “there are no stupid questions.”
- At the end of the meeting, summarize your observations of the participatory process: what went well and what the group can do differently next time. This might be an opportunity to engage staff in the process as well, by doing a “round-robin” to get everyone’s feedback. (A round-robin is when each staff person present has a chance to speak briefly to share a success or voice a concern.)

Modeling Participatory Behaviors and Coaching Participants

- Lead the way in discarding traditional roles. For example, offer to take minutes or write brainstorming ideas on a flipchart so that the secretary is not automatically expected to do these tasks.
- Use facilitative communication skills with everyone. This will show that each person’s opinion is valued regardless of his or her position in the facility’s hierarchy. (Stop talking or writing when they speak, make eye contact, smile or nod if appropriate, summarize their comment or suggestion when they finish, etc.)
- Demonstrate how to disagree respectfully. Take issue with the idea, not the person—do not put someone down or make personal attacks.
- Arrive promptly, be well prepared, and open and close the meeting on time.
- Encourage staff to take risks. You can remind them that sometimes the ideas that sound most far-fetched at first can contribute to workable solutions. Model respectful listening to reinforce staff expressing a novel idea.
- Talk about strengths. Begin any problem analysis or staff meeting with a statement about the good news: a successful delivery following a complication, reduced complication rates (if statistics are available), or a complimentary comment from an external visitor about how a particular process or issue has been handled. If you do not have any good news to report, you can ask staff if they do. People are often too modest to mention positive qualities if they are not asked.
- Give concrete examples of improvements in quality. People love to hear “true life stories” about how prominent institutions also have had problems. Do not, however, give names of institutions or individuals. It is important to maintain confidentiality and to reassure staff that their problems will not be discussed at another site’s QI exercise.
- Keep the participants on track. Although you are acting as a guide rather than a director, you should maintain control of meetings. Your primary jobs are to keep the discussion focused and to avoid repetition of issues wherever possible.