

Adventures in Facilitation

Being a facilitator is often like being a deep space explorer. Think about it. You're beamed into an unfamiliar environment, with a group of humanoids you've never met, and while you think you have a plan and the equipment you'll need, anything can happen (people + Mother Nature x technology = black hole). Unfortunately, most of us can't send out a distress call ("Houston, we have a problem") and immediately have a cadre of engineers working on solutions to get us home safely. No, a facilitator, like the actor in a red shirt on Star Trek (aka, expendable character normally eaten, disintegrated or assimilated), is usually on our own.



Case in point. I was hired to facilitate a two-day strategic planning retreat for a great, young, nonprofit on a "ranch" in a "lodge" on the Gulf Coast. Being a long-distance gig, I had only spoken with the Executive Director by phone. When I arrived at the GPS location, it was a little different than I had imagined. And, well, the weather was not quite as ideal as I had hoped for a coastal excursion. It was a little cloudy and windy on day 1, but everyone made it and we had a productive, though slightly cramped work session.



Overnight, rolling lightning and thunder storms, rocking rain, water rising, and not a lot of sleep for anyone...

Day 2 started with a power outage. So, it was sort of like camping. We had already looked our "best" now we pretty much looked our worst. However daunted, we charged ahead with planning. With no electric light, very little natural light, we improvised.



Strategic planning by iPhone...



There's an App for that...



Ahh, candle light always sets a calming mood...

We were actually getting along pretty well, and thinking the worst was past. But oh, no, as the rain continued, the only road "in" is washing "out". An emergency evacuation was called around noon.



So we stopped work and caravanned to the other "lodge"- which was incidentally also still without power. Each car followed the running lights of the car ahead hoping to learn from any mistakes made by the driver in front of them.

My little compact car was nearly lost in a swirling sink hole that had formed, but the safety personnel were ready to jump in to make the rescue if necessary.

So at the alternate location, work continued regardless of dark, hot, humid, conditions with the drenched and bedraggled board. A gas stove provided enough heat for coffee and a warm meal and despite it all, spirits were still high. Come on, I mean, we just had to laugh!



By end of the day we could say,
work done,
storm past,
water receding,
Board happy.



And a little friend (just around 6ft) came up to greet me as I left the ranch.

All in all, I earned my fees and had a memorable experience. Crisis averted and the world spins on. As adventures go, this one was another happy ending.