



## Discussion Guidelines

### Our Purpose

To build a communication model that supports our mission of providing opportunities for education, exposure, community and economic empowerment for women bloggers.

### Our Philosophy

1. We are all here for a common purpose.
2. We are open to different perspectives.
3. Treat others the way you want to be treated.
4. Listen twice as much as you speak.
5. Value dialogue: Everyone has something to contribute.
6. An honest and positive environment fosters better discussions, ideas and results.
7. Balance seriousness with humor – life is short!

### Our Guidelines

- 1. Treat others the way you want to be treated.**  
To put it another way, we value intellectual honesty above all. Yet we know we can find a way to be intellectually honest without being rude.
- 2. No PowerPoint®.**  
We believe PowerPoint presentations do not enhance our open discussion format. You should prepare for your panel discussion, but do not use PowerPoint® in your presentation. Exceptions have been made for instruction-based sessions.
- 3. Five to ten-minute limits.**  
No one person or group of people, including the panelists, should talk for more than five to ten minutes at a time. If you find that a person or group of people is dominating a discussion, ask for opinions or questions from others in the room.
- 4. The group alters the agenda.**  
If you need to shorten the agenda to fit the allocated time, **ask the group to decide** if an item can be saved for post-conference discussions. Remember, we can blog afterwards.
- 5. Use a designator when necessary.**  
A designator is an object that shows a person has the right to speak. If people are talking over each other or interrupting, then use one. In most cases the microphone is the designator and is passed to the next person so she can speak.

## 6. Inform, do not shill.

We understand that people bring expertise and passion because they work in a certain field, support certain products or services, or focus on a certain political position or advocacy cause. But this is not a vendor conference or partisan convention, and there is a fine line between informing the group and pitching or shilling. To avoid shilling:

- **Disclose where you work or your material relationships.** Tell the group that you work for a company in the field you are talking about, especially when one of your products/services is under discussion. This should also include disclosing if you are sponsored by, a spokesperson for, or otherwise connected to a company/product/service/organization being discussed.
- **Avoid talking about your products/services.** You're less likely to start pitching it to us. If possible, let someone else on the panel or in the room describe them for you. We err on the side of having **users** report on their experiences with products and services, vs. employees or other spokespeople.
- **Do not compare your products/services to competitors.** Let others do that.
- **Just give us the facts, ma'am!** If you have to talk about your products, do not give your opinion about it or your competitor's products.
- **Call others on their shilling.** Whether moderating, speaking or attending, politely tell someone they're promoting and not informing. Give them a chance to rephrase or alter what they are saying. They may not realize they are doing it. It's OK to call this out and remind everyone about the guidelines against shilling.



## Discussion Guidelines

### Roles of the Moderator

#### The Traffic Cop

- Ensure everyone stays on topic.
- Ensure everyone who wants to speak gets the opportunity.
- Ask questions so information flows to and from the audience.
- Ensure no one dominates the conversation.
- Give warnings if any speaker runs over time.

#### The Devil's Advocate

- Challenge a consensus to promote divergent opinions.
- Ask the question people seem to be avoiding or afraid to ask.

#### The Diplomat

- Remind people that everyone's opinion matters.
- Highlight areas of agreement among members.
- Quell arguments that do not move the discussion forward.
- Make sure everyone 'plays nicely'.

#### The Comic

- Relieve tension.
- Remind participants why we are all here.



## Discussion Guidelines

### How to Moderate

#### Before you start:

- Make sure you know how to pronounce your speaker names and blog names.
- Find out if your session has a sponsor, and if a BlogHer spokesperson will be on hand to thank the sponsor.
- Find out if any of your speakers have a book in the bookstore or are doing a signing after the session, so you can announce that at the end of this session.
- Have your “pocket questions” on hand to give you a session outline to follow.
- Identify your live-blogger and your mic wrangler, and assign one of them to double as a back-up time keeper for you.

#### Getting Started

- Begin on time. Clearly state your session’s name and track.
- Let the moderator introduce the panel. **Names and blogs can be sufficient.** Speaker bios are in the program if attendees want to learn more. Encourage people to review the online agenda or pre-conference guide to learn all about our amazing speakers.
- Go over the agenda, objectives, and desired outcomes of the discussion. Better yet, make sure to ask what attendees expect from the session!
- Remind everyone that the session is being live-blogged and audio recorded. Ask folks to make sure they speak into a mic when asking a question or offering commentary.

#### Keeping the Discussion Moving Forward

- Act in the different moderator roles: Traffic Cop, Devil’s Advocate, Diplomat and Comic.
- Monitor your own participation—are you dominating the conversation? Remember: the role of the moderator is to keep the discussion flowing – even your own part of the discussion.
- Keep track of ideas, point out repeated ones, summarize and move forward.
- Ask another question if the group has gotten stuck on one topic.

#### Finishing

- Coordinate with your time keeper to give you the signal when panel time is running down. Let everyone know when there are only 10 minutes left.
- Note any follow-up actions or agenda items (e.g. sharing handouts, further meet-ups etc.)
- **If applicable, let attendees know if the speakers are signing books in the BlogHer Bookstore.**
- **Thank everyone for attending!!**



## Discussion Guidelines

### When Good Participants Go Bad

Bloggers are passionate about what they do. Sometimes that passion can get misdirected and a heated discussion can turn downright ugly. What was once a great session becomes a room full of uncomfortable people. 'Disrupters' at a conference usually engage in four types of disrupting behaviors: Mocking, Interrupting, Dominating and Attacking.

If a good participant turns to bad behavior in one of your sessions, address the problem in the nicest and most polite way possible. Staying calm can prevent escalation. **Remember:** They probably do not realize they are causing a problem.

#### Mocking

- If a comment has the potential to be constructive, invite elaboration.
- Comments like "That's dumb," are unacceptable and need to be expressed differently.
- Reiterate that everyone has something to contribute.

#### Interrupting

- Physically move between the interrupter and interrupted and face the interrupted. This can be a subtle but effective way of redirecting energy without embarrassing the person interrupting.
- If still necessary, ask the interrupter to wait until the speaker finishes her thought.
- Ask the person who was interrupted to continue.
- If the discussion is dominated by one or a few interrupters start a speakers list and use 'turns' to help keep discussion organized and accessible.

#### Dominating

- Acknowledge that the person has some expertise in the area you are discussing.
- Nicely ask the person to let others share their knowledge and opinions.
- Announce a shift to a round-robin format, moving focus around the room.

#### Attacking

- Move the focus away from the individuals who are doing the attacking.
- If it's not related to the meeting, tell them to take it offline.
- If all else fails, ask them to leave.