* *Create questions that encourage people to share their own experiences, to interpret information, and to respond to scenarios.* Avoid questions that can be answered yes/no, require detailed analysis, are vague, or are too narrow. Some questions should be merely fact-finding—questions designed to learn some basic information about the participants. Others can ask for opinions and interpretation. As appropriate, use questions that ask participants to respond to a scenario.
* *Arrange seats to encourage discussion.* A circle or semi-circle is more conducive to discussion than chairs arranged in lecture style. If the number of participants makes a circle or semi-circle impossible, you—as facilitator—should move to different positions in the room during the discussion.
* *Make sure you can be heard.* If you have no microphone and have not led many discussions, it may feel unnatural to speak as loudly as you need to speak to be heard by a group. Confirm with the group that they can hear you, including those most distant from you.
* *Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.* When speaking in public, the natural instinct is to rush. Remember to take your time and speak clearly. This may seem artificial to you, but it will not to your audience.
* *Avoid staring at the PowerPoint presentation.* This makes it harder for all to hear you, doesn’t engage the audience, and makes it impossible for you to read their reactions.
* *Remind people of the purpose of the session and clarify expectations.* Let people know that they are here to learn from one another—to share their experiences related to the topic at hand. Let them know that everyone has something important to contribute, that you hope to hear from everyone, and that you hope people will listen carefully to others as well as share their own experiences.
* *Work out the meeting details together.* Categorize and prioritize the issues, possibly through an initial voting or ranking system. Assign responsibility for defining each issue and documenting related discussion.
* *Use simple techniques to encourage broad participation.* When asking questions, it is fine to simply let anyone who cares to speak up answer the question. What do you do if no one speaks up? Or what if only one or two people dominate the conversation? Two techniques will help:
  + Begin with questions that anyone can answer. For example: “What is your role in the hospital?” or “How many people are on your revenue cycle staff?”
  + *Go around the room.* Ask the same question to each person in the audience. Although this approach may seem stilted, it will guarantee you a response and can help make people more comfortable participating in further discussion. This technique also will yield more diverse response when one or two people are dominating a discussion. When deciding which part of the table to start with and which direction to go, consider a sequence that will ensure the discussion-dominators are later in the sequence.
  + *Call on people.* People will respond when called on. You may feel that you are unfairly “putting someone on the spot,” but people usually are formulating responses and are happy for a little encouragement to speak. You can employ this technique in three ways. You can choose someone you know well and you know will give a solid, thoughtful response. Also, you can call on someone who seems to be actively following the conversation and seems to want to speak, but has not. Finally, if several people have been quiet and seem disengaged, you can call on them to help them feel part of the group.
  + *Break into groups.* Arrange exercises for smaller group discussions / brainstorming. Get more participants engaged with one or two such activities.
  + *Speak privately to participants who are speaking too much or too little.* If someone is dominating the discussion, you can privately ask the person to help you by allowing the more reserved participants to answer first. You may also want to talk privately with quieter group members, find out their ideas, draw them into the discussion and ask the person to follow up.
* *Do not be afraid of silence*. When you are facilitating a discussion, a second of silence feels like an hour. However, silence is your friend. By allowing silence after you ask a question, the participants get time to formulate a reply, and they learn that they—not you—are responsible for carrying on the discussion. Similarly, do not rush in too soon when a person appears to be finished with an answer. It is tempting to avoid potential silence, but if you pause, two things could happen: 1) the speaker may have more to add, and 2) another participant may have a comment to make.
* *Do not be a slave to a specific list of questions*. After you get a response to a question, do not feel that you automatically must move to the next question on the list. There are a number of ways you can build on a response:
  + *Ask others to respond to the comment.* Ask whether others agree or whether they have had a similar experience. Sometimes one comment can generate a long and worthy discussion. The phrase, “What do you think about that?” is your best friend.
  + *Ask the person for additional information.* Frequently, people will provide a general thought, but not specific examples. Ask the person—or others in the group—“can you give me an example?” or “can you tell me about a time you have faced that challenge?”
* *When a discussion goes seriously off track, intervene*. Although a free-form discussion can be appropriate and engaging, if the discussion wanders too far from the basic topic, focuses too much on a narrow issue, or turns into a gripe session or a social hour, say something like this: “Those are all great points, and I think we’ve done well on that topic. Now, I have another area to explore.”
* *When people are speaking simultaneously, intervene.* When people are talking over one another repeatedly, or if side discussions are taking place, let the group know that it needs to have one speaker at a time. Although this may seem awkward to you, the group as a whole will be very glad you intervened.
* *Be wary of doing too much of the talking yourself.* Although it’s fine for you to share some of your experiences, your primary role is to elicit responses from others, and sometimes a facilitator who speaks too much sends the message to the group that it does not need to participate. Make sure ***they*** are leading the meeting. Involve others in leadership roles through reporting out from breakout sessions, etc.
* *Have fun.* You’re in a room with colleagues who share similar experiences. Don’t hesitate to smile, laugh, and enjoy this opportunity.

Source: HFMA – CAT Training