

EXECUTIVE FORUM 2024

BEST PRACTICES MANUAL



Forum  **Outside**.®

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Section 1: Executive Forum Success Principles

A successful Executive Forum creates a safe space for members to share challenges, reflect, and support one another in discovering unique solutions to their challenges. Great groups share an extremely high level of personal respect which creates an atmosphere of trust and openness in which each person can contribute freely and where individual problems and opportunities can be identified and explored.

The Executive Forum Success Principles are:

1. Shared Vision/Purpose and Values
2. Confidentiality
3. Commitment
4. Executive Forum Protocol
5. Membership
6. Leadership
7. Meeting Structure

These principles are grounded in the belief that:

PRACTICAL SKILLS + RADICAL SELF-INQUIRY + SHARED EXPERIENCES =

GREATER RESILIANCY + ENHANCED LEADERSHIP

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 1: SHARED VISION/PURPOSE AND VALUES

Executive Forum are strengthened when their members share a common vision and purpose and when the values that relate to the Executive Forum are similar. For members to have shared vision, purpose and values, they must state their individual expectations as well as what they want to experience in the Executive Forum.

Developing a Shared Vision / Purpose and Values Statement

Consider the following when developing your Shared Vision/Purpose and Values statement:

1. What do I want to get from the Executive Forum?
2. What am I willing to give to the Executive Forum?

Sample Shared Vision/Purpose and Values Norm

Our shared vision/purpose is to become better leaders by sharing our personal and business lives in an atmosphere of confidentiality, trust, respect and intimacy. We commit to ourselves and to each other the time, resources and opportunity to achieve the personal and professional growth we desire.
Our values include trust, transparency and openness.

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 2: CONFIDENTIALITY

Executive Forum members must have total certainty that matters discussed in Executive Forum remain confidential. A breach of confidentiality may mean expulsion from the Executive Forum.

- Confidentiality needs to be emphasized at every meeting.
- Confidentiality is not selective.
- Everything that is said in Executive Forum stays in Executive Forum.
- Permission must be granted to take information outside of the Executive Forum.

Sample Confidentiality Norms

- Confidentiality is not selective.
- Nothing is discussed with outsiders, except with permission.
- Confidentiality is absolute, in all ways and forever.
- Executive Forum business may be discussed outside of meetings only in private settings with other Executive Forum members.
- Suspected breaches will be reported to the moderator.
- A breach of confidentiality can result in the resignation or expulsion of the person who committed the breach.
- All members have signed a Forum Agreement which includes a confidentiality clause.

Levels of Confidentiality

Confidentiality is always in place within the Executive Forum. Nothing may be Confidentiality shared with anyone outside of the Forum. You can share the concepts of the discussions, but not the particulars. There are two exceptions to the confidentiality level:

- Executive Forum members can ask for and receive specific permission from the member who is the information holder to share a specific piece of information outside of Executive Forum.
- A presenter receives valuable input that he/she would like to act upon outside of Executive Forum. In this case, the presenter can use this information, as long as the source of the information remains completely confidential.

Breach

Breaches of confidentiality strike at the core of an Executive Forum and are therefore considered grievous trust violations. When an Executive Forum member has breached another member's confidence, she must take responsibility, admit it directly to the injured party and apologize for it. A member who has had her confidentiality breached should contact the moderator to discuss the situation. The moderator will investigate the incident and bring the matter to the Group for discussion a resolution as appropriate. Breaches in confidentiality may result in a member's expulsion from the Executive Forum.

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 3: COMMITMENT

Members who give high priority to the Executive Forum arrive on time, are fully attentive and respectful of other members, participate with vigor, stay until the conclusion of the meeting and arrange their busy calendars with the Executive Forum in mind. To create the type of atmosphere necessary for success, it is essential that every member be committed to the Executive Forum.

Absences

Executive Forum members should strive for 100% meeting attendance. Each forum will determine how many meetings a member can miss and still remain in the forum. If a member misses a predetermined number of meetings (usually one or two), all forum members will discuss whether the member will remain in Executive Forum and if the member's current situation is affecting his/her ability to attend meetings. The Executive Forum and the affected member may determine that the member is not able to commit to the Executive Forum and should, therefore, resign.

In-Person Meeting Absences

Attendance at Executive Forum in-person meetings is typically mandatory. Most Executive Forums will allow a member to be absent only in the case of extreme circumstances. Unanimous consent is necessary to reinstate a member who misses an in-person meeting.

Sample Commitment Norms

Attendance:

- We will meet in-person two times each year and attendance is mandatory
- We will have monthly Zoom calls.
- 100% attendance is expected.
- We invite any member to call an emergency meeting or Zoom call of the Peer Group. Attendance at an emergency meeting is voluntary.
- Each member will advise the moderator prior to an absence.

Punctuality:

- We will start and end our meetings on time
- Zoom calls and In-Person Meeting Dates:
- Executive Forum members will set the time, date and location of meetings.
- All dates should be set at least 6 months in advance.
- Amendment to meeting dates to be organized by the person with the conflict. (This is to be done at a meeting and not over the phone or by email.)

Distractions/Other Electronic Devices:

- We will turn off all other electronic devices during the meeting. All other distractions and interruptions will be kept to a minimum.

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 4: EXECUTIVE FORUM PROTOCOL

When functioning correctly, an Executive Forum is a caring group where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Executive Forums use a communication model, Executive Forum Protocol, to establish and maintain a safe environment in which members openly and freely interact without fear of judgment. The goal is to explore options and expand the presenter's world view, rather than come up with a single solution.

Executive Forum Protocol:

Listen	Seek first to understand. Focus on feelings.
Accept	Suspend judgment. Put your critic and cynic on hold.
Question	Ask clarifying and thought-provoking questions. Enquire to identify the real issue and create self awareness.
Share	Respond from your head and your heart. Use "I" statements—speak from your own experience.

Listen

Use active listening.

- Listen beyond the words to hear the feelings.
- Recognize your own reactions to the speaker's feelings, content, language and intent.
- Pay attention to body language and tone of voice to determine what the person is feeling. Then, offer feedback about what you heard to check for accuracy and promote further discussion.
- Active listening communicates:
 - "I understand your feelings."
 - "I take you seriously."
 - "I am interested and concerned."
 - "I do not want to change you."
 - "I respect your ability to solve your problems."

Accept

Accept others without judgement.

- Recognize that the speaker's statements are true for them, even though you may disagree or reject their conclusions, decisions, etc.
- It is important for members to feel equal, thus avoid using "you must," "you mustn't," "you should," "you shouldn't" "you need to," "you have to." All of these create a one up, one down situation.
- Judgmental language creates a defensive climate and an unsafe environment. It closes the door to open and meaningful communication.
- Allow the presenter to express his/her true emotions about the issue.

Question

Share something of yourself before asking a question.

- Questions to embarrass or lead the speaker to your own interpretations or conclusions are to be avoided.
- Tell the presenter why you are asking the question and then ask the question. It helps the presenter feel safe and provides insight.
- Avoid interrogation. It puts the presenter on the defensive.
- Clarifying questions benefit the listener by clarifying which experience to share. Avoid too many questions, which may put the presenter on the defensive. Examples:
 - “How many employees do you have?”
 - “How long has this been an issue?”
- Thought-provoking questions help the presenter to see his/her situation from a different angle. Avoid embedding questions with advice or judgment. Examples:
 - “What’s the worst-case scenario?”
 - “What’s the best-case scenario?”
 - “If your partner were making this presentation, what would he/she say that is different from what you’re saying?”

Share

Speak from you own experiences, rather than giving advice.

- Use “I” statements. Speak only for yourself. Take ownership of your comments.
- Be specific and brief. Make your point and then give the floor to the next person. If your point has already been made, do not restate it. Move on to the next point or the next person.

Avoid These Destructive Behaviors:

- Not listening
- Changing the subject
- Interruptions
- Interrogations
- Judgmental remarks
- Attacks
- Playing junior psychologist
- Sarcasm
- Inappropriate humor
- Unsolicited advice



SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 5: Membership

Composition The Executive Forum experience offers diversity by including members of different backgrounds with varied interests and values.

Diversity Diversity in membership is encouraged in Executive Forum as it provides for varied and vibrant group interaction and broad feedback. There may be occasions where a member needs to present to the forum on an important issue but cannot do so in the presence of another member(s) due to a business conflict. In these circumstances, the member(s) may be asked to excuse themselves for the duration of the presentation so that the member can speak freely without concerns about sensitive information reaching their competitors.

Conflicts of Interest Conflict of interest considerably reduces the openness of the group. Because Executive Forums require openness to be effective, conflicts of interest diminish the benefits that members receive from participating in Executive Forum. Anything that will inhibit a member from sharing openly could arise from a conflict of interest in the group.

Defining Business and Personal Relationships

Executive Forums are encouraged to adopt norms related to outside relationships that could create a conflict of interest. It is highly recommended that each Forum take the time to discuss and clarify its stance on these types of relationships and to write norms that clearly state what is and what is not acceptable. The norms also need to address what happens to members when a conflict of interest develops. The Executive Forum can decide to alter the norms to reflect the group's evolving philosophy about these relationships.



SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 6: LEADERSHIP

Every Executive Forum member however, including the moderator, is responsible for the success and well-being of the Forum. Bart Foster will be the moderator for this Forum.

Moderator Role

The Moderator's role is to:

- Hold sacred the norms of the group and ensure the stability of the container. When needed, I will gently hold participants to the commitments they've made and guide them back when they stray outside the boundaries agreed to.
- Guide, model, and at times, teach the coaching skills that are integral in creating the conditions for the Forum to support each other in increasing their agency and resiliency together.
- Call forth or challenge the Forum towards the best version of themselves. One of the great things about an executive coaching group is the agreement made to personal growth.

100% Responsibility

Each Executive Forum member is 100% responsible for their own experience. This means making requests, sharing concerns and bringing a solutions-oriented approach to creating the experience that will serve themselves and the group. Each member should ask themselves: *Am I willing to take 100% responsibility for getting what I want and need from this group?*

Leadership Qualities

Self-Awareness – Effective leaders know themselves. They have a deep understanding of their emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. This awareness leads to an honesty and sense of authenticity that others can perceive in them. Leaders with a high degree of self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them as well as others. Self-awareness allows for openness, honesty and vulnerability.

Listening – Do people believe that you want to hear their ideas and will value them? Great peers are good listeners. They are receptive and genuinely interested in the views and input of others. People instinctively understand that leaders who listen want them to share their ideas and that these ideas will be valued. Listening is a skill that can be developed and is essential for those who desire to be an effective Executive Forum participant.

Empathy – Do people believe that you will understand what is happening in their lives and how it affects them? Effective leaders understand and empathize with others' circumstances and problems. Leaders who are empathetic have earned confidence from others by understanding whatever situation is being faced.

Awareness – Do others believe you have a strong awareness for what is going on? Strong leaders have a keen sense for what is happening around them. They are always looking for cues from the environment to form their opinions and decisions. They know what’s going on and will rarely be fooled by appearances.

Persuasion – Do others follow your requests because they want to or because they believe they “have to”? Effective leaders seek to convince others to do things rather than relying on formal authority. They are naturally very persuasive and offer compelling reasons when they make requests. They never force others to do things. An ability to find common ground and build rapport is necessary.

Self-Regulation – All people experience bad moods and emotional impulses, but leaders who utilize these feelings are not prisoners to them. Instead, these leaders can create an environment of trust and fairness. A person who has strong emotional awareness has a talent for reflection, is comfortable with ambiguity and change.

Organizational Skills – Leading effectively requires that you have a good measure of control over situations, are aware of deadlines and conscious of time allocations, and are able to prioritize and delegate effectively.

SUCCESS PRINCIPLE 7: EXECUTIVE FORUM MEETING STRUCTURE

Executive Forum meeting structure is the backbone of the meeting. It does not exist to confine. Rather, structure creates freedom to allow open discussion and to allow everyone in the Executive Forum to participate. Meeting structure keeps the group focused and increases take-home value.

Meeting Structure

Most Executive Forum calls last approximately 90 minutes
Most in-person meetings are anywhere from 4 hours to a few days.

Recommended Meeting Structure For A Call:

- Confidentiality Reminder
- Check-ins
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Updates
- Parking Lot
- Confirm Discussion Topic for next meeting
- Discussion Topic
- Parking Lot updates
- Closing/ Housekeeping

Section 2: Meeting Topics

Executive Forum topics are areas of shared interest to a majority of members that are discussed and explored by the group.

Selecting Topics

Sometimes topics emerge during the group's updates. As the updates continue, a pattern develops, revealing that several members are referring to the same thing with only slight variations among them. It is recommended that topics be determined 3-6 months in advance from the topics stored in the "parking lot"

Sample Topics

- Leadership challenges
- Managing conflict
- Building trust in a team
- Market/Industry trends
- Innovation
- Management
- Responding to current events
- Transitions – professional, personal, relational
- Money/finances
- Dreams
- Values



EXECUTIVE FORUM SUCCESS PRINCIPLES

- **Shared Vision / Purpose and Values:** We commit to care for each other.
- **Confidentiality:** Nothing, Nobody, Never.
- **Commitment:** Strive for 100% Commitment
- **Executive Forum Protocol:** Listen, Accept, Question, Share
- **Membership:** Diverse, without conflict of interest.
- **Leadership:** Everyone in Executive Forum is responsible for the success of Executive Forum.
- **Structure:** Meeting format, equality, time management.

SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

Fast Check-In ~ 5 Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome. • Reminder to turn off all electronic devices. • How are you? Is anything holding you back from engaging in Executive Forum today? (Be brief: 30 seconds or less)
Clear the Air ~ 5 Minutes	Are there issues between people in the Executive Forum that would cause you not to be fully engaged today?
Confidentiality ~ 1 Minute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidentiality reminder. • Have issues emerged around confidentiality that are limiting your trust today?
Roles & Responsibilities	Moderator appoints timekeeper to track time during the entire meeting.
Updates ~ 20 Minutes	Updates are about listening – listen without interrupting. When you speak: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take 3-5 minutes per person • Be introspective – this is your time. • Identify your key issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Top and bottom 5% of your life - Potential Opportunities - Issues sapping energy or causing stress
Parking Lot ~ 10 Minutes	After each Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Executive Forum member writes his/her key issues and feelings in the Zoom chat box • Member determines priorities for his/her parking lot issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 = High Urgency, High Importance 2 = High Importance • The Executive Forum takes about 1 minute to highlight any further observations, and the member may then add additional issues to the Parking Lot. Moderator takes notes about issues for future presentations and topics.
Select Discussion Topics for next Meeting	When you speak: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of stress and negative impact • Member who has not presented • Member's wants or needs • Adequate preparation time
Discussion Topic ~ 45 Minutes	Discussion Format: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of issue (uninterrupted) • Clarifying Questions • Moderator facilitates feedback Closure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenter shares specific value gained • Presenter can request follow-up and ongoing support Approximate Timing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15-20 minutes 10 minutes 5-20 minutes 7-10 minutes
Pop-Up Topics ~ 10 Minutes	As time permits, impromptu topic discussions may take place.
Housekeeping ~ 5 Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for future action: next meeting time, location, presentations, in-person meeting planning • Other issues - finances, adherence to norms
Check-Out ~ 5 Minutes	What worked for the meeting? What would we do differently?

UPDATE PREPARATION

5% Update Form

Overall Rating (1-10, NO SEVENS):

BUSINESS / LEADERSHIP

FAMILY / RELATIONSHIPS

PERSONAL / INTERNAL

Focus on the top & bottom 5% of your life; circle the 1-2 areas either causing stress or supreme euphoria. For each item, think about the emotion and feeling that arises for each.

	LAST 30 DAYS		NEXT 30 DAYS	
	<i>BEST THING THAT HAPPENED</i>	<i>PAIN, CONCERN, OR DISAPPOINTMENT</i>	<i>LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST</i>	<i>GREATEST CHALLENGE</i>
BUSINESS / LEADERSHIP				
FAMILY / RELATIONSHIPS				
PERSONAL / INTERNAL				

If I could be radically supported today, the issue I would explore is:
