

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## Introduction

On Sunday, June 30 from 12:00 to 1:30 EST, the CEA-HOW Phonebridge put on a workshop about how to lead a Phonebridge meeting. The workshop was intended to help CEA-HOW Members gain insight and ease at leading a meeting.

Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, a recording of that Webcast was not made. However, afterwards, each of the Speakers provided their notes. This document compiles all of the main points the Speakers had communicated during the workshop.

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 1: How to lead a Phonebridge Meeting***

- My name is Roberta S., and I'm a compulsive eater
  - o My date of Abstinence is 1/31/2007
  - o I'm maintaining a 70 lb weight loss
  - o I sponsor on all levels; not available as a Sponsor currently, but always available for outreach
- My topic for this Workshop was to talk about the basics of how to lead CEA-HOW Phonebridge meeting
- First, how do you get to be the leader of a Phonebridge?
  - o Usually, it's a service position that is made available at each individual Phonebridge meeting's Business Meeting
    - Most Business Meetings are held one a once month, some are held other month; each meeting decides on their own how often they hold their Business Meeting
    - But during the Business Meetings, usually near the end of the Quarter, they will announce that there is a service opportunity to be a Leader for that meeting
    - You volunteer, the fellowship votes, and if you are elected, you become the Leader for the next term
    - So, volunteering at the meeting's Business Meeting is the most common way to become a Leader
  - o However, sometimes no one has stepped up to be a Leader for a meeting, and so whoever is there at that moment, and has the Abstinence requirement, that person "takes the meeting"
    - That actually happened to me this morning...I went to get on a meeting, but there was no leader, so someone had to step in on the spot as a Leader
      - It's a good reminder how important this service position is, being a Leader...
      - For my own Recovery, I have to work CEA-HOW's 7 Tools and one of those tools is to attend 3 meetings a week
      - If there is no meeting, I can't do one of my tools, and therefore my own Recovery is at risk
      - Therefore, our fellowship needs meeting Leaders so that we can all get in our required Meetings during the week
      - Just like it says in our literature, "Let's all get involved to help CEA-HOW, because service is freedom from bondage of self"
  - o The Leader position requires 30 days of Abstinence (regardless of whether your elected to that position at the Business Meeting, or if you step up on the spot)
  - o The term of the position is usually for 3 months (one Quarter, so Jan/Feb/Mar, or Apr/May/June, etc.)
  - o Sometimes you are volunteering to be the Leader for the whole time—just you—during that 3 months, but sometimes people share that position (e.g. , one person does the first and third Saturday of the month, someone else does the second and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month; these people "co-lead" the meeting). It's up to the you and any other Co-Leaders to decide how you want to handle it.

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 1: How to lead a Phonebridge Meeting***

- You are allowed to serve 4 consecutive Terms (so 4 Quarters, or one year), but then you're encouraged to step aside and let someone else lead (we call that "rotation"...it's good for the fellowship and the person serving for there to be a rotation of Leaders).
- Next, what information or training do you get to help you be a Leader?
  - There is a Script that you follow
    - It's about 3 pages long, and you just read it ("Welcome to the Sunday morning 7 AM Eastern time meeting of Complusive Eaters Anonymous – HOW. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am the Leader for this meeting. Would you join me in the Serenity Prayer...")
    - Usually, whoever was the Leader before you, or the Business Meeting Secretary, gives you the latest Script (sends it to you via email or snail mail)
    - The basic Scripts are available for down load from the internet, however, since each meeting is autonomous, they can make changes to the Script over time, for example:
      - Some meetings don't make announcements during the Meeting, they just give out the number to call to get the weekly announcements, while other meetings have that Phonebridge Meeting's intergroup rep read the announcements live, every week
      - Or some meetings DON'T ask people to leave their numbers after their Shares, others DO ask people to leave their numbers
      - So that is something that might need to be changed in the Script, to reflect what the group conscious had been on a particular issue
    - But the key point is, as the Leader, you just have to follow the Script
  - Additionally, you'll be give a list of the Leader codes
    - These are the codes that tell you how to mute the meeting, turn the chimes on or off, etc.
    - We do NOT ever reference these codes publically on the Phonebridge, but as a new Leader, any of the previous Leaders will go over with you how to use the Leader codes
- Next, you just show up at the appointed time and Lead the meeting!
  - "Suit up and show up" which is one of the slogans I've heard in program
  - Yes, it is scary
    - Yes, I will likely do it wrong, yes I will make mistakes
    - And when I make mistakes, *everyone* will know! ☺
    - But part of my Recovery is to learn that it's OK to make mistakes
      - I remember several years ago, long before I was in Recovery, I was going to school in Scotland
      - I was on kitchen duty one morning, and assigned to make breakfast for my fellow students
      - There were several of us on kitchen duty, but my role that day was to cook the food
      - I didn't cook then, and so I made a mistake in following the receipe...I think I put 18 eggs into the mixture rather than the 3 or 4 called for

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 1: How to lead a Phonebridge Meeting***

- I was horrified when I realized it...I'd done it wrong! My first reaction was, "Throw it out!"
- But one of my fellow students working in the kitchen said, "No, it's OK. They'll eat it."
- And I still thought, But no, I did it WRONG...it won't be right, they can't eat it, etc. etc.
- But my friends said, No, it's OK. Just serve it.
- So I did, and everyone ate it, no one died
- I am grateful that, now in Recovery, I can accept that yes, I will make mistakes (not "if" but "when"), and that it's OK because *God is in charge*
  - God is in charge now
  - And he's always been in charge
  - I can Let Go and Let God in this circumstance (e.g., being a Leader, or just facing life's other challenges)
- So, I get to practice these types of things here in program so that when I'm out in the real world, I can practice these principles there, too
- What types of things have gone wrong for me in a meeting?
  - Background noise
    - Toilets flushing, someone working in the kitchen, someone having a conversation with someone else without being muted
    - When that stuff happens, as the Leader I just mute the line
      - Sometimes I've noticed Leaders are reluctant to mute the line
        - They will instead try and ask people to please mute their own phones by pressing \* 6
        - However, in my opinion, the person making all the noise probably doesn't realize it's them, and so they just continue to make noise and not mute themselves
      - Therefore, as the Leader, I might ask everyone to please make sure they're muted, but if that doesn't address it, I just mute the line (it's very easy and it lets the meeting continue quickly with minimal interruption)
    - The worst I've ever encountered (I wasn't the leader) was when there was this huge static on the line, and no one could hear anything other than this high pitched static sound
      - Nothing much you can do in that circumstance
      - It's a good reminder to me that really God is in control of these meetings, not me
        - Our Tradition 2 says, "Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern"
        - And in our Tool line, it says, "Service is Abstinence...being a leader", and "service is giving of ourselves to help CEA-HOW function. Let's all get involved to help CEA-HOW because we all know that Service is Freedom from bondage of Self."

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 1: How to lead a Phonebridge Meeting***

- So all of these things remind me that it's really God that's in charge of the meetings, and I'm just his Servant
  - Another difficult thing that has happened in meetings is arguments between people
    - Yeah, it happens (we're all sick)
    - But as a leader, I try to be polite and kind, and just follow the script ☺
- What are the things I for sure try and do as the Leader of a Phonebridge meeting?
  - Keep it quiet
  - Facilitate the meeting
  - Let there be silence (took me a while to get comfortable with that)
  - And also, when I lead, I tend to sit down in one spot, and actually take notes
    - When I'm NOT leading, and am just a participant in a meeting, I do admit that I tend to multi-task...I'm at the gym or prepping food in my kitchen etc.
    - But as a Leader, I am writing down who did the readings, who shared, who's going to stay behind to help the newcomer, what people's phone #'s are
    - That then helps me afterwards, when I need to make my calls
      - I know who was at the meeting
      - I have written down phone #'s
      - All good excuses to make my outreach calls
  - Also, as the leader, I try to pay attention to what people are actually reading when they do the standard readings at the beginning of the meeting
    - For example, when we read the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, we are to use the CEA-HOW version, not the AA version (which references alcohol rather than compulsive eating)
    - If someone DOES read the wrong version, I will let them finish, and then immediately afterwards, I'll say, "Just a gentle reminder that when we do the readings we are to read the CEA-HOW version of the Steps (or whatever)".
- What are things I do NOT do as a Leader
  - I never unmute everyone at the end when we do the Serenity Prayer
    - If people want to unmute themselves, they can
    - But I've been on meetings where the Leader unmutes everyone at the end, and many of the meeting participants are in places where there is a lot of noise and/or they are no longer paying attention to the meeting so they're talking to others, etc. It's just a bunch of noise and chaos. So...I don't unmute everyone at the end...if someone wants to unmute themselves to say the Serenity Prayer with them, they can do that on their own
  - Also, I try very hard as the Leader not be the one speaking all the time
    - I just try to follow the Script...not add a bunch of my own opinions or comments or mini-shares
    - I know I get tired of me often enough, and me talking all the time as the meeting Leader will mean others might get tired of me, too, so I try very hard to just follow the Script and keep my own comments to a minimum
- Now what have been the benefits I've personally seen as a result of Leading a meeting?
  - Well, I let people get to know me

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 1: How to lead a Phonebridge Meeting***

- I have a long history of practicing isolation, and so my leading a meeting is a way for me to put myself out there to connect with my Fellows
  - I get to know others, and others get to know me
  - That's a good thing
- I also get to Serve (and service is freedom from bondage of self)
- I also get to write down phone #'s which I can use on my own outreach calls later
- So that's been my experience in leading a meeting
- Thanks for this opportunity to share

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 2: Crosstalk***

Article on Crosstalk new information for me (please see article at the end of this talk)

Question: How do I parlay this new understanding of crosstalk into leading a phone bridge meeting:

Start with Serenity Prayer.

My job as leader- to do what is humanly possible to set the tone to create an environment where people feel welcome, accepted and safe enough to share honestly

- When someone engages in “crosstalk”- “gentle” reminder – be mindful of tone and word choice in issuing such a reminder. Ask for help from Higher Power in conveying the message in a kindly manner so as to inform without shaming another.
  - o This is an imperfect science at best. Coming into recovery, my people skills are under developed
  - o We do our best, turn it over to Higher Power and trust that we will be guided to respond appropriately
  - o Sometimes it is in this very act of leading a meeting that we learn these valuable people skills and grow in emotional maturity.
- Other 12 Step meetings may allow crosstalk, some encourage people to share what might be considered actual processing of an issue in progress or even something akin to a 5<sup>th</sup> Step which might be better shared with a sponsor
- With CEA-HOW's disciplined and structured approach, meetings are dedicated to sharing experience, strength and hope. We're sharing in the solution
- Remember- this is a program for those whose compulsion has reached a critical level. We have accepted the Steps, Traditions, Concept & Tools as requirements for our recovery.
- With this in mind, I must remain aware that part of the service I give as a leader is to keep the meeting on topic.
- “Love and tolerance of others becomes our code.” I came here, battered and bruised and hypersensitive to criticism. When I lead a meeting, I ask myself how I would wish to be treated.

### CROSSTALK

What is it? Why does it hurt?

Webster says that crosstalk is “interference in one track of a recording caused by another track.” In 12-step programs the term “crosstalk” is used to describe various forms of “interference” in meetings. We speak of crosstalk with reverence or vehemence, but, there is confusion about its actual definition within the fellowship.

Suggested CEA-HOW guidelines are:

1. The only appropriate comment about anyone's share – a speaker's or another member's – is: “Thank you for your share.”
2. Any comments, negative or positive, about another's share, experience, life, program, or remarks are crosstalk – that is, interference.
3. A member may talk about his or her own experience as it relates directly or indirectly to another's share, but should not refer to that person's share. Even comments such as “When you talked about...it reminded me of my own experience,” are possibly inappropriate.
4. Any form of interruption – remarks, side conversations, gestures, laughter, an extreme facial expression, or a spontaneous outburst – is crosstalk.

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 2: Crosstalk***

5. Any advice given during the meeting – whether asked for or not – is crosstalk. If advice is requested, it can be offered after the meeting or by phone.

Why does CEA-HOW strongly discourage crosstalk? There are several reasons:

~We need to feel safe about expressing our experience, strength, and hope without fear of direct or indirect response (“interference”). For many members, these rooms are the first place we have felt safe speaking about our experience.

~Crosstalk is frequently judgmental, expressing an opinion, whether good or bad, of the person’s share. Being judgmental is a character defect many of us are trying to let go of.

~Crosstalk can break a person’s anonymity by introducing information not mentioned in the person’s share, revealing relationships outside the meeting.

Avoiding crosstalk helps to guarantee safety, protect privacy, and ensure anonymity for all of us. It is suggested that each meeting do two things to eliminate crosstalk: 1) Define crosstalk in a group conscience at a business meeting; and 2) include the definition and the prohibition of crosstalk in the format at the opening and the closing of the meeting.

Avoiding crosstalk in our meetings should not discourage anyone from sharing, but, rather guarantee that each member speaks just about his or her own experience, strength, and hope.

(taken from various intergroup newsletters)



# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## *Speaker 3: Meeting Formats*

### Meeting Formats: an Expression of the Group Conscience, and Leaders as Trusted Servants

1. How the fellowship guides our phone bridge meetings:
  - a. The website is a source for general CEA-HOW meeting formats (Speaker, book study, topic, to name a few).
  - b. The group conscience taken at the business meeting makes changes to the format to suit the needs of the particular meeting and promote the running of a smooth meeting.
  - c. Each meeting is autonomous, so the business meeting is of vital importance to the wellbeing of the fellowship, it is where our voices are heard and unity can develop through the voting process. Regular attendance of business meetings by the members allows our steps and traditions to be expressed through service and action.
  - d. What decisions can be made at a business meeting? Some examples are:
    1. Managing crosstalk
    2. When to exchange phone numbers
    3. Minimizing crosstalk
    4. Requesting that specific foods not be mentioned
    5. Leader rotation
    6. Announcements, including the intergroup report
2. Leader Responsibilities based on the group conscience:
  - a. Leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern, once decisions are made it is the responsibility of the meeting leader to implement the changes or modifications to the format.
  - b. How do we use the format to manage the flow of a meeting? Let's look at some examples:
    1. Someone speaks up and asks to share after stating they don't meet the abstinence requirement. The leader can read the format where it clearly states that you must have 30 days of abstinence to pitch, or 7 days **if the pitching has been discussed with your sponsor**. That is the answer, and the leader doesn't have to try to figure out what to say. Our formats define our guidelines!
    2. A member jumps in to take a second share. The format states, "and please no second shares until everyone who wants to share has had a chance to," and the leader re-reads this as a gentle reminder, and can interrupt that person if necessary.

By doing this, it not only benefits the meeting by maintaining the structure, but it also relieves the leader of having to make decisions based on their feelings in the moment. As leaders we might experience frustration, fear, or a desire to control or people-please, or feel overwhelmed. When we follow the format as it is written, we are acting for the good of the group and not out of our own sense of comfort or discomfort. We can be confident in our role as trusted servant when keeping the meeting under control.
  - c. Some of the situations that the leader may be called on to manage are:
    1. A noisy meeting (the mute button is your best friend!)
    2. Sticking to the subject at hand (by repeating the topic or reading periodically)
    3. Not mentioning specific foods (just a gentle reminder, tone of voice is everything!)

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## *Speaker 3: Meeting Formats*

4. Refraining from discussing outside issues, ex. Non-conference approved literature
5. Frequent interruptions to the meeting including asking for phone numbers (we have a big phone list!)
6. Announcing service positions that are open and offering support to new leaders
7. Rotation of leadership based on our quarterly schedule: the importance of rotation of leadership is to insure that no one person should be manager for too long to avoid becoming possessive of “our meeting”, and fail to see the importance of letting other share the bounty of this service. Sometimes, it is easier to let others stay in the same service position than step up ourselves.

3. Another role as a trusted servant is for the former leader to be a support person for new leaders by encouraging others to step up and providing experience strength and hope. Remember, we learn a lot about ourselves and others when we lead a phone bridge meeting, so we have much to offer by providing the most updated format, being available for outreach for specific questions or concerns, giving feedback when asked, and continuing to participate in the business meeting and group conscience. That way, the meeting isn't starting from scratch every time the leadership rotates!

So, why does any of this matter? Why can't I just lead a meeting any old way I feel like it? I want to be spontaneous, right? Ours is a program of recovery founded on discipline and structure, service, and the importance of ego reduction by placing the group welfare before our own. Quoting from our CEA-HOW concept,” to be certain, much of our strength is found in **the structure** of meetings...”, and leaders can demonstrate that strength by being good managers, answerable to the group conscience, and by using their God given abilities when asked to step up for this service.

Respectfully submitted by Martha S., compulsive eater.

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 4: Maintaining Boundaries***

I began my talk about boundaries with the following story:

"Many years ago, when I was brand new in our sister fellowship, I was given an opportunity to lead my very first meeting. The meeting I was to lead was one of the largest in a major city, regularly attended by as many as seventy people. I ended up allowing the meeting to run over its allotted time period because I was too afraid to have someone displeased with me for having to cut short their share when they were over time. So, I put my own fears of being disliked before upholding the time boundaries that were there for the benefit of the group. It was a hard lesson but a memorable one, namely that a trusted servant serves, they don't angle to win popularity contests."

The above example used a clearcut boundary, that of the meeting's beginning and ending time. Other boundaries are trickier to handle and judgement is needed in the moment.

I gave examples of boundary issues I would handle immediately right then and there:

- A member interrupting the meeting or another member who is sharing, clear cut crosstalk situation
- A member reading non conference approved literature
- Someone who is not a member of CEA-HOW speaking
- A member not respecting the time boundary when notified

I gave an example ( which raised some controversy) about a situation I might choose to handle privately after the meeting is over, namely a member getting overly religious when pitching.

I gave the following examples of situations that I would not feel it is appropriate to interpret as a boundary issue, in other words trying to deal with them would cross over to "policing or governing" and would not respect our second or third traditions.

- A member sharing off topic, or sharing something in poor taste, controversial, or not "being positive" or rambling. In other words, a member's sharing is their own and must remain so if safety is to be had in our meetings. Obviously the tricky exception is to balance personal freedom with our common welfare in regards to ours being a spiritual program as opposed to a religious one and of course this problem did come up in question period.
- I would not stop a member from reading because they were not good at reading, or struggled with language etc.

I touched on the unique challenges to maintaining healthy boundaries on the phone meetings:

- Technical problems such as background noise or having additional people calling in on the leader code.
- People are more inclined to act out or act on impulse, interrupting because they can not be seen or even identified.
- Normal social constraints of body language and facial expressions don't exist. This is a very profound challenge and dovetailed neatly into the stress several of us placed on speaking in as calm and courteous tone as we can.

# The Ins and Outs of Leading a Phone Bridge Meeting

## ***Speaker 4: Maintaining Boundaries***

- Elder statesmanship is not literally visible for new leaders.

I spoke about how it's ok to take off the leader hat for three minutes and pitch as another CEA-HOW member.

I mentioned asking for help from more experienced leaders, that it is ok to make mistakes, correct oneself etc.

I very briefly mentioned the twelve concepts of service (though I don't believe I used the term) in regards to the leader being trusted by the group to uphold the traditions to best of their understanding while leading - without any argument from members. If members disagree, they have the right, nay the duty to dispose the leader at the proper time but they have placed their trust in the leader for the time that the meeting lasts.

Submitted by Amy S., a CEA-HOW member