

THE ART OF THE ROOM

7 Starting
Points



FLYNTROK

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7 Starting Points



This isn't a manual. It's a nudge.

Not a how-to. More of a "have you thought about...?"

Over the past few months, we at Flyntrok have been talking about the little things that lift the game when working with people—whether in a team room, a boardroom, or a breakout group next to a flipchart that's trying not to fall.

We've found that these "little things" aren't so little after all. A better pause. A clearer question. A sharper close. And instead of keeping these thoughts in the warm safety of our internal meetings (and the occasional side-eye from someone who didn't get coffee), we thought we'd put them down and send them out.

What you'll find here are seven themes. They're deceptively simple. But behind each is some quiet work—and possibly some reflection of your own.

1 You'll begin with a familiar tool: the question. Except it's less about asking and more about unlocking.

2 Then we move to a forgotten hero: prework. (Spoiler: prework doesn't have to feel like homework.)

3 Next, we explore those charming moments when a session doesn't go to plan—yes, the curveballs.

4 There's a quiet reminder that time isn't just a constraint, it's your co-facilitator.

5 And then there's energy—how to sense it, shift it, and sometimes just sit with it.

6 A reflection on framing follows—because sometimes it's not the team, it's the lens.

7 And finally, the ending. Because how you leave the room often matters more than how you enter it.

Each piece contains a bit of story, a thought game, and something to carry with you—be it a quote, a question, or a quiet provocation.

This is not a prescription. You won't find formulas or guaranteed outcomes. These are just a few clues. The work of figuring it out is still yours. So pick a theme. Sit with it. Take what's useful. Leave the rest.

And maybe, the next time you're in the room—something in here will sit beside you, quietly nudging.

Happy facilitation.

Team Flyntrok

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1 The Power of Questions

In our work with organisations and communities on change, we place a great emphasis on questions. At Flyntrok, we've found that the right question at the right time can shift the course of a conversation, unlock hidden perspectives, and spark lasting movement. This document shares some of what we've learnt. If it helps even a little in bettering the craft of facilitation, it's done its job.



Why Questions Matter

A good question does more than invite an answer. It opens a door.

In a room that feels stuck or slow, the temptation is to push harder—offer a solution, restate the agenda, or fill the silence. But the best facilitators learn to do something quieter. They ask a better question.

The right question doesn't demand. It draws. It creates space for people to think, not just speak. It allows uncertainty to surface without shame. It shifts the group from defending positions to discovering perspectives.

Principle 1:

All questions are not equal.

All questions are not equal.

Consider these two:

- Why did you do that?
- Can you walk me through what led to that choice?

One feels like a test.
The other feels like an invitation.

Principle 2:

Tone changes the meaning of the question.

Tone is not decoration. It's direction. It shapes whether a question feels safe or sharp, curious or combative. As a facilitator, your tone says: I'm not here to catch you out. I'm here to walk with you.

A question lands only if the tone lets it land.

Principle 3:

Open Ended Questions have a role to play.

There's a reason facilitators lean on questions that begin with "What," "How," or "Where." These questions open things up.

Closed questions often seek agreement or compliance. Open questions seek understanding.

Open-ended questions allow people to bring their full selves into the room—not just what they think the facilitator wants to hear. They invite reflection, not just reaction. And they remind people that their voice matters, even if their view is still forming.

In the end, a good question doesn't just clarify a problem. It connects people. And connection is where real progress begins.



3 Questions That Changed the World



1. What if the Earth goes around the Sun?
Asked by Copernicus, this reoriented not just astronomy but our place in the universe.
 2. What is a thought made of?
This question sparked the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence.
 3. Why are some nations rich and others poor?
This single question gave rise to the disciplines of modern economics and development policy.
- Facilitators don't always ask world-changing questions. But we do ask room-changing ones. And that's a good place to start.

18 Questions to Unlock a Stuck Room

When the room is quiet

- What's something we're not saying right now?
- If one thought had to open this up—what would it be?
- What's one idea we can try without getting it right the first time?

When one voice dominates

- Let's hear a completely different angle—who'd like to offer one?
- What are we missing by only exploring this?
- What would someone outside this room say?

When there's gridlock

- What's keeping us here—and what could move us forward?
- If we had to act today, what would we do?
- What feels risky, but worth a conversation?

When energy dips

- What's the one word in your head right now?
- Let's flip it: what's making this hard and what's making it worthwhile?
- If this moment were a scene in a film—what would happen next?

When there's tension

- What's the story underneath this?
- How can we hear each other before we try to solve this?
- What part of this do we agree on already?

When things feel too nice

- What's one truth we're avoiding because it's uncomfortable?
- If this fails a year from now, what will we regret not saying today?
- What's something no one wants to say—but someone probably should?

Bonus

Open or Closed? - The Question Audit

A 3-step game to sharpen your instincts, reflect on your style, and steal better questions.

Step 1: Spot It

Read the 10 questions below.
For each, circle:

- Open-ended (invites exploration)
 - Closed-ended (limits responses)
1. Do you agree with the decision?
 2. What about this concerns you?
 3. Who else needs to be in this conversation?
 4. Can we wrap this up in 10 minutes?
 5. What would success look like here?
 6. Are you sure this is the right approach?
 7. How do we ensure everyone feels heard?
 8. Isn't this what we tried last time?
 9. What are we not seeing yet?
 10. Will this work

Step 2: Reflect

- Which closed question felt most like something you've asked?
- Why do you think you chose it? What was your intent?
- Now rewrite it as an open question.

Step 3: Steal a Better Question

Pick one of these to keep in your back pocket:

- What might we be missing?
- How does this feel from another perspective?
- What would make this 10% better?
- If this fails in a year, what will we wish we had said now?
- Where do we already agree—and where don't we?

Final Prompt:

When I lead with curiosity, I...

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Quote to Hold On To

Judge your success by the quality of the questions you ask, not just the answers you give."

- Peter Drucker



Want to Go Deeper?

Book: A More Beautiful Question by Warren Berger

(link https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/A_More_Beautiful_Question/ke3VAQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA2&printsec=frontcover)



Research: Questions increase liking and impact

(link : <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=52115>)

2 Before the Room: Prewrite That Actually Works

In our work with organisations and communities on change, we've come to see that what happens before people enter the room often shapes what happens inside it. At Flyntrok, we believe in designing thoughtful prework—not just to gather data, but to build readiness. This short note shares what we've found useful. We hope it helps you frame prework that works—for your people and your process.



Prewrite That Actually Works



Principle 1:

Prewrite is not homework.

It's not about compliance. It's about curiosity. Good prework doesn't feel like a task—it feels like a warm-up. It gets people reflecting, not proving. It invites thought, not just information.



Principle 2:

Keep it short. Make it sharp.

Two or three questions. One page, max. Enough to spark, not to swamp. Good prework respects people's time—and their attention spans.



Principle 3:

Design for the room.

Prewrite should set up the room, not sit outside it. Ask things you'll refer back to. Use language that matches the session. Let it lead naturally into what happens on the day.

Popular Example

Airbnb Host Training (2016)

Before training sessions, Airbnb sent hosts a simple 2-question survey:

1. What are you most excited to learn?
2. What's one hosting challenge you've faced recently?

They found that these two questions led to higher participation, more empathy among peers, and deeper takeaways.

Small prework. Big impact.

Useful Prework Templates

Template 1: The Story Starter

- Tell us a moment from the last 3 months that gave you energy at work.
- What made that moment possible?

Template 2: Mirror & Window

- What's one strength you bring to your team?
- What's something you'd like to get better at?
- What have others said they value in you?

Template 3: Before & After

- What's one question you're coming into this session with?
- What would make this time well spent?
- After the session, how will you know it made a difference?

Bonus

Activity: Spot the Prework Fail

Below are three prework examples. One is helpful. Two are classic mistakes. Can you spot which is which?

- A. 'Please write a detailed 3-page SWOT analysis of your department and bring it to the session.'
- B. 'In one sentence, what's a question you've been sitting with lately about your work?'
- C. 'Please fill out this 47-question leadership survey. Be honest. We'll be showing your answers in the room.'



Reflection

1. Which one felt inviting?
2. Which ones felt like chores or traps?
3. What would you redesign in each?

Facilitator's Prompt:

'How can I use prework not to prepare content—but to prepare people?'

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Quote to Hold On To

"You don't start a meeting when people walk in. You start it when they first hear about it."

- *Peter Block*

Want to Go Deeper?



Book: *The Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker

A powerful read on designing intentional gatherings, with a strong emphasis on how you begin.

"The opening, even before the opening, signals to your guests what to expect."



Research: Pre-meeting Communications: Effects on Decision-Making in Teams (Kerr & Tindale, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2004) Brief, pre-meeting reflections or agendas lead to better engagement, idea diversity, and decision quality.

Key insight: Even small nudges before a session can alter group dynamics meaningfully.

3 Energy Hacks: Keeping the Room Alive



At Flyntrok, we often say that energy in the room is not just about the people—it's about what we invite. Whether we're working with leadership teams or community groups, the energy in the room determines how far the group will go. Facilitation isn't about hype or high fives. It's about awareness—and small interventions that make big shifts.

Not long ago, during a strategy offsite, we noticed the room dipping. The conversation was rich, but the air was heavy. Instead of pushing through, we paused. Asked everyone to walk around, find a spot by the window, and just reflect for two minutes. When they came back, someone laughed. Another added a perspective they'd been holding back. No slides. No music. Just space to breathe. Sometimes, that's the hack.

Energy hacks aren't about raising volume. They're about shifting attention. Changing posture. Refreshing perspective. They can be subtle. Or playful. But they must be intentional.

Think of Cathy Freeman at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. She lit the Olympic flame—and days later, carried the hopes of a nation in the 400m final. The stadium was packed. The air was thick with emotion. She didn't play to the crowd or try to hype anything. She simply stood still. Collected. Present. Her run was silent, smooth—almost meditative. When she won, she stood again. Quiet. Holding the moment. Not trying to lift the energy, but honouring what was already in the room.

That's energy work too. It's not always about adding spark. Sometimes it's about holding the charge without flinching.

Simple, Subtle Energy Shifts

Principle 1:

Honour Silence

Not all dips are bad.
Some are transitions. Let
them settle

Principle 2:

Inject a reset moment

A stretch, a story, even a
silly question.

Principle 3:

Use the room

Change the speaker, the
seating, ask them to
stand by what resonates
the most.

Bonus

Game: What's the Energy Saying?

Think of your last session—when did the energy dip?

Pick one moment, and answer these:

1. What was happening just before the dip?
2. What was the group avoiding?
3. What did you feel—but didn't say?

Now imagine hitting pause and doing something—anything—different. What might that have been?

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Quote to Hold On To

"The energy in the room is the loudest thing in it."
— Anonymous (but every facilitator knows it's true)



Want to Go Deeper?

Book: 'The Power of Moments' by Chip and Dan Heath

This book explores why certain moments carry emotional weight—and how you can design them. It's filled with examples on how small changes in structure, surprise, or elevation can spark energy and engagement.

4 Handling Curveballs: Staying Steady in the Storm



Every facilitator has had that moment. The agenda's in place, the group seems ready—and then comes the curveball. Silence when you expected spark. A participant who takes over. A sudden leadership drop-in that shifts the tone. Curveballs are part of the game. They don't ruin a session. In fact, they reveal your readiness.

The trick isn't to control the room. It's to stay in the room—with presence and a bit of humour. Breathe. Smile. And remind yourself that people aren't being difficult; they're being human. And you're here to hold that space. Not to fix it, but to work with it.

Good facilitation is like a street play—you rehearse, you prepare, but when the crowd gathers, you respond to their mood, their energy. You adapt, without losing the story. You work with what shows up. You don't cling to the script. You respond, with curiosity and care.

What Can You Do When Things Go Off Script?

Principle 1:

Pause. It's powerful. Take a breath, make space. Sometimes the group needs that as much as you do.

Principle 2:

Ask a simple question to bring the group back in. Try: "What's needed now?" or "Where do we go from here?"

Principle 3:

Lightly reframe. "This is different from what we expected—but maybe it's exactly what we need to explore."

Principle 4:

Don't rush to rescue. Trust the group. They're capable of sitting in discomfort—if you model it.

When Abdul Kalam Said 'I Don't Know'



During a public Q&A session, a student once asked Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam a highly technical question about space propulsion. It was the kind of curveball that many public figures might try to deflect or bluff through.

But Dr. Kalam simply smiled and said, "I don't know." Then he added, "But I will find out—and maybe you can too. Let's explore it together."

In a world where saying 'I don't know' is often seen as weakness, Kalam turned it into an act of strength and humility. He modelled what many facilitators forget—that the room doesn't need a hero. It needs a human.

Thought Provoker: What's Your Default Move?

The next time something unexpected happens in the room, notice your first instinct. Is it to explain? To push through? To shut it down?

What would it mean to pause instead—and invite the group into the disruption?

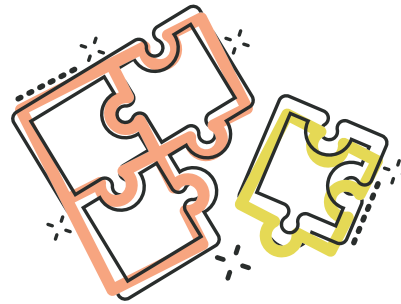
Mini-Game: Curveball Responses

Which of these responses feels most like you?

1. "Let's stay with that tension. What's underneath it?"
2. "Let's take a moment. What's emerging for you?"
3. "Looks like we're improvising. Let's go analog!"
4. "Thanks. Can we check what the group's making of this?"

Match the response to the facilitator:

- A. Participant dominates every conversation.
- B. The tech breaks mid-exercise.
- C. Tension erupts between two members.
- D. Sponsor interrupts to push their view.



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Quote to Hold On To

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." — F. Scott Fitzgerald



Want to Go Deeper?

Book: 'Improv Wisdom' by Patricia Ryan Madson

A wonderful book on using the principles of improv to navigate the unknown with grace and humour.



Research: "Group Emotion and Group Performance" (Barsade, 2002)

This study shows that emotional cues in groups are contagious. A facilitator's calm or panic sets the tone more than they think.

5

Time is a Tool: The Quiet Superpower of Facilitation

At Flyntrok, we've seen it repeatedly: in the hands of a good facilitator, time bends. It opens up when something important needs to be said. It tightens when energy lags. It holds space for pause—and nudges a group forward when they drift.



But here's the thing: time isn't something to be managed. It's something to be designed. A good session isn't about how much time you have—it's about what you do with it.

We were facilitating a session with senior leaders. Tightly packed agenda. Little room for flex. Then came a moment—someone named an unspoken tension. The air shifted. The facilitator paused, looked at the group, and asked: "Would you like to sit with this for a while? It means we'll drop something else." The group nodded. That conversation became the turning point of the day.

They didn't stick to the clock. They honoured the moment. That's using time as a tool—not a taskmaster.

It reminded us of a story from Europe. In 2019, President Emmanuel Macron launched the Citizens' Climate Convention—a group of 150 randomly selected citizens from across France, tasked with proposing climate legislation. Facilitators didn't rush. They built in deliberate space—for discussion, disagreement, even silence. Macron publicly committed to reading all their proposals, without filtering. That act of giving time—to people who rarely get it—transformed the process. Several recommendations became law. Macron later said: "They reminded us how long real democracy takes—and why it's worth it."

It echoed the spirit of Singapore Conversations, where people were invited into long-form dialogue to shape policy. Time wasn't just a constraint—it was the invitation.

There are times you compress time to spark urgency. And times you stretch it to let wisdom surface. Just like a good cook adjusts the flame—not just follows the recipe—a good facilitator adjusts the clock.

Game 1: Timeline Tension

You've got a 3-hour session, five items to cover, and a room that's not quite present.

Ask yourself:



1. Which item could you happily drop if something deeper emerged?
2. Where will you create breathing space—on purpose?

3. If you had to cut 20 minutes, where would it hurt the least?
4. Where might more time feel like a gift, not a delay?

The goal isn't to stick to the plan. It's to honour the work.

Game 2: Stopwatch Swap

Imagine these moments in a session. For each, do you:

-  Speed it up  Slow it down
 Let it be

1. A shy participant opens up for the first time
2. A long-winded explanation loses the group
3. The group finishes early—but no one is saying much

4. A disagreement erupts just before lunch

You can't extend the session. You can only move things around.

What do you buy time for? What do you trim?

The clock doesn't lead the room. You do.

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Quote to Hold On To

"Time is a created thing. To say 'I don't have time' is like saying 'I don't want to.'"
— Lao Tzu



Want to Go Deeper?

Book: Designing Meetings That Matter

— Richard and Emily Axelrod

A practical guide to making time work for real participation and thoughtful design.



Research: "Time Pressure and Performance: A Meta-Analytic Review" — Maruping et al., Personnel Psychology, 2015

Shows that time pressure doesn't always reduce quality. It depends on how time is framed and used.

Read summary: <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12067>

6 Framing & Reframing: The Lens Shapes the Room



At Flyntrok, we often say that the first words spoken in a session can change the last ones. That's the power of framing.

Framing is how you shape the room's lens—what this conversation is about, why it matters, and how it should feel. And sometimes, when a session feels stuck, it's not the group that needs to shift. It's the frame.

We were working with a multi-location team that had just gone through a difficult re-org. The agenda was set. But in the first 10 minutes, we could sense the unease. The original frame was: 'Let's talk about the future.' But the energy said: 'We haven't dealt with the past.'

We paused and asked, "What's something you wish others in this room understood better about your current reality?" The shift was instant. People didn't just speak. They shared. That one reframing changed the entire arc of the session.

Framing isn't just the opening slide or question. It's the scaffolding. Reframing is how you evolve it mid-session when the structure no longer holds. It's not rescuing. It's redirecting with care.

Framing Tips:

Principle 1:

Start with 'Why now?' not just 'What for?'

Principle 2:

Use metaphor or image, not just logic.

Principle 3:

Build the emotional tone into the cognitive setup.

Principle 4:

Reframe gently—offer a new window, not a rebuttal.

Kazuo Inamori and Kyocera's Turnaround

Kazuo Inamori, founder of Kyocera and KDDI, was once brought in to rescue Japan Airlines from bankruptcy. Instead of framing the task as a corporate rescue, he reframed it as a moral duty to the employees, passengers, and the country. He started by gathering frontline workers and asking what pride meant to them—and what they'd lost. This emotional reframing—from debt to dignity—transformed morale and decision-making. Within two years, JAL returned to profitability.

The frame didn't just change the tone. It changed the trajectory.

Game: Frame It Again

Take these typical lines heard in meetings and try a reframing:

1. "We've already talked about this."
2. "There's too much to cover."

3. "It's not my job."

4. "They won't change anyway."

Now reframe each without denying the emotion. Add oxygen. Add possibility.

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Quote to Hold On To

"Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change." — Wayne Dyer



Want to Go Deeper?

Book: *Thinking in Systems* – Donella Meadows

Shows how reframing assumptions can shift how we act in systems.



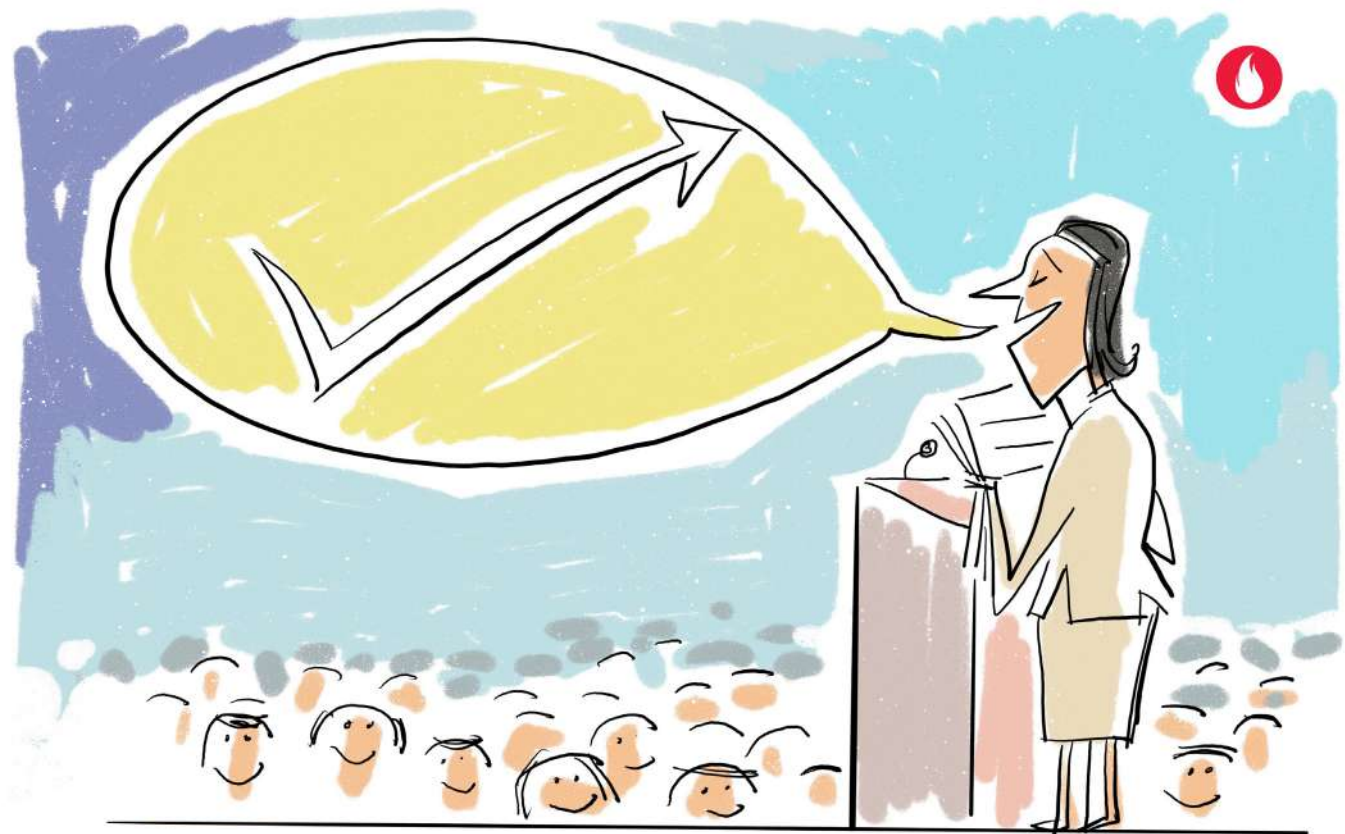
Research: "Framing Effects on Decision Making" – Tversky & Kahneman, 1981

Changing the wording of a problem changes people's choices.

Summary: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_effect_\(psychology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_effect_(psychology))

7

The Exit That Sticks: Ending a Session with Meaning



At Flyntrok, we often say: “A session is only as strong as its last 15 minutes.”

A strong ending doesn't just wrap things up. It builds continuity. It ensures that ideas don't just land—they take root. Because here's the truth: many sessions are thoughtfully opened, skilfully facilitated, but hurriedly ended. That final stretch becomes a blur of time checks and thank-yous. The moment flattens. The meaning leaks out.

But the best facilitators treat the ending like a doorway, not a full stop. A well-crafted ending allows people to make meaning, not just take notes.

We once worked with a government advisory group. The session had gone deep. Ideas had emerged, tensions had surfaced, new commitments had started to form. But as the clock ran out, the leader in the room jumped in with a “Great job, everyone,” and the meeting dissolved. It took us weeks to rebuild momentum in the next conversation. Why? Because the work wasn't closed, it was just cut off.

Ending a session isn't about a summary. It's about a signal. A signal that says:

- ☑ This mattered.
- ☑ You mattered.
- ☑ And what you carry out of this room still matters.

Principles That Make Endings Stick:

Principle 1:

Endings should match the session's emotional weight. If it was light—keep it light. If it was deep—don't dilute.

Principle 2:

Invite reflection without requiring disclosure. Give people choice.

Principle 3:

Let people name their takeaway—but let them keep it if they want to.

Principle 4:

Use metaphor, memory, or silence—not just action items.

Dr. Verghese Kurien's "Thank You" Moment

Dr. Verghese Kurien—the Father of India's White Revolution—was known for his discipline, precision, and clarity. But those who worked closely with him remember something more subtle. After every townhall or board meeting, he had a habit of walking across to the most junior person in the room—often the stenographer or tea staff—and asking: "What did you take away from today?"

It wasn't performative. He genuinely listened. Sometimes he smiled. Sometimes he followed up. For him, the end of the meeting was the beginning of accountability. It wasn't how the meeting ended for the room—it was how it echoed for the people.

We remember sessions that end like that.

Game: Echo or Fade?

Look at your next meeting agenda. Now imagine it's over. Ask yourself:

1. What do I want people to feel when they leave?
2. What do I hope they'll remember—not in 5 minutes, but in 5 days?
3. What action will they take that connects back to this moment?
4. What kind of close will make the room still for just a beat?

Design your ending not as a wrap-up, but as a handover. Because what happens after the session is also part of your facilitation.

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Quote to Hold On To

“People may forget what you said or did. But they remember how you made them feel.”

— Maya Angelou



Want to Go Deeper?

Book: *The Art of Possibility* – Rosamund & Benjamin Zander

Especially the chapter “Leading from Any Chair” explores how endings can energise responsibility, not just relief.



Research: “The Peak-End Rule” – Daniel Kahneman & Barbara Fredrickson

We don’t remember everything. We remember the emotional peak—and the ending.

About Flyntrok

Flyntrok is a human centric change firm. We help organizations, communities and individuals change and adapt to a new world. We do this by keeping the human at the centre of it all. We help rethink, retool and reskill for relevance.



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