

## Temperature Reading

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Pioneering family therapist Virginia Satir developed the temperature reading for discovering a group's *temperature*—what we in technology often call the system's *state*.

A facilitator leads the discovery. He or she keeps the team focused on each agenda item; works with the members to help them communicate information congruently; and publicly displays each contribution so the team can review the temperature data throughout the meeting.

The temperature reading consists of five items in the following sequence: 1) Appreciations, 2) New Information, 3) Puzzles, 4) Complaint with Recommendation, 5) Hopes and Wishes.

### **Appreciations** (past)

The first item focuses the team on the positive aspects of past experiences between the members.

A model for an appreciation is—

“\_\_\_\_\_ (person's name), I appreciate you for \_\_\_\_\_ (doing some specific thing).”

For example, “*Don, I appreciate you for creating the annotated bibliography in our session handout. It's cool and I feel it increases the value of the handout.*”

Amplify the power of an appreciation by standing face-to-face with the recipient and looking into their eyes while appreciating them.

### **New Information** (now)

A teammate may learn, within minutes of a temperature reading, news that affects the perception of its state. This agenda item provides an opportunity to share the news so everyone has up to date information, which may eliminate someone's puzzle or complaint that may have come up in the next two agenda items. For instance, “*Moses (the CIO) just announced the creation of a Project Management Office to prioritize and coordinate projects within the department.*”

This item is also an opportunity to alert the team to foreseeable interruptions. For instance, “*My father is in the hospital and I'm expecting a call from the doctor to update me on his status. When the doctor calls, I'll step out of the meeting for a few minutes to take his call. My (meeting) buddy will update me on what transpired while I was gone.*”

### **Puzzles** (now)

This agenda item is an opportunity to share something that is puzzling a member; for instance, “*I'm puzzled about how to connect to the wireless network.*”

The facilitator is responsible for preventing people from using puzzles as a vehicle to make a complaint. Complaints are the subject of the next agenda item so the facilitator will ask an individual whose puzzle sounds like a complaint to restate it during the next agenda item.

### **Complaint with Recommendation** (now)

After puzzles are noted, the next agenda item is an opportunity to share a complaint and make a recommendation for eliminating the complaint. Recommendations are critical for preventing other members from feeling burdened to solve the complaint so, carefully note, *complaints without recommendations are NOT allowed.*

For instance, during last year's tutorial, a tutorial participant said, *"I won't be able to remember the specifics about each agenda item in the temperature reading. I recommend that you provide more information about each item in the handout."*

### **Hopes and Wishes** (future)

An opportunity for members to share with each other what they would like to have happen in the future. For instance, *"I hope the members of my triad stay in touch throughout the conference."*

### **Final Thoughts**

**A temperature reading is about uncovering the state of a team: It isn't about solving a puzzle or deciding whether to accept a recommendation.** Use those discoveries to schedule separate meetings to solve problems and make decisions.

The success of this method depends on how safe members feel about sharing information. The safer people feel, the richer and deeper the information they will provide. Part of the facilitator's role is to foster a safe environment where members feel safe to share what they know and feel.

I advise against altering the sequence of the agenda items. The sequence is carefully designed to move the team from past to present to future.

I prefer a rapid fire method for gathering people's contribution so the reading is completed in 25–35 minutes. I typically ask people to raise their hand if they have a contribution; create a stack of contributors; and process each person's contribution. Processing name stacks enables me to keep the meeting within the expected duration. How? I monitor the time carefully and if we are consuming it too rapidly, I stop at the end of a name stack and move to the next agenda item.

Regardless of the methods used to collect the information, I believe you will find that a temperature reading is an effective method for revealing the state of the team to its members.

If you have questions or need help, please contact me at [steve@stevenMsmith.com](mailto:steve@stevenMsmith.com).