3-4-5 Go!

by Ben Slotznick

Engaging presentations and
facilitated discussions for the non-charismatic

Executive Summary

3-4-5 Go! is a step-by-step method to promote audience discussion, interaction and participation. For each 20 to 25 minutes of planned session time, a facilitator prepares 3 key points, practices 4 minutes of remarks, and plans 5 open ended questions to stimulate discussion about the key points. In the session, the facilitator primes discussion by having people sit next to those they don't know and then introduce themselves, thereby establishing right-hand and left-hand pair-offs to work as discussion partners. The facilitator employs Turn-and-Talk (Go!) between partners to trigger initial discussion on each question, then brings results of each pair-wise discussion before the whole group to synthesize by using a scribe. The session concludes with a final synthesis and reporting out.

Contents

1: **Overview**

3-4-5 Go! is a learning, presentation, and teaching method. It's a way of communicating material that combines a limited succinct presentation with the expansive aspects of facilitated discussion. It provides focused meaningful content, yet guarantees audience participation, and circles back with reinforcement to ensure understanding.

It's designed for the many of us (probably the most of us) who know our material, but are neither charismatic nor improvisational. It's for those of us who might not be extroverts or rabid conversationalists, but are nonetheless sometimes called upon to lead "sharing" sessions where exchanging experiences and viewpoints with and among the audience is an important feature.

The key elements of ***3-4-5 Go!*** are:

3 key points delivered by a presenter or panelist,

4 minutes in which the presenter delivers those points, and

5 open-ended questions that the presenter poses to the audience about those key points.

Go! is a set of activities generating individual discussion and group analysis.

- **Go** techniques using **right-and-left-hand partners** engage everyone in the room in discussing the questions by pairing them up in face-to-face interactions, plus
- **!** – After the Go exclamatory and encapsulating undertakings solidify learning via group reporting, presenter commentary and group discussion, using **synthesis with a scribe**.

The Go techniques include aspects of (a) Turn-and-Talk (also called Think-Pair-Share) developed as a classroom teaching method, often instigated by the phrase: "Turn and talk to your partner. Go!" as well as (b) some of the variations of Speed-Sharing, which also employ stop and go instructions.

3-4-5 Go! brings Turn-and-Talk out of the classroom into the less-scripted world of conferences and symposia. In those settings, "break-out sessions" that purport to engage in stimulating shared conversation among strangers are often less than successful, because expert discussion facilitators are rare. The novel amalgam of techniques in 3***-4-5- Go!*** puts new tools in the hands of a broad range of presenters and practitioners.

3-4-5 Go! adds unifying elements to the sometimes fragmented experiences of Speed-Sharing.

More importantly, ***3-4-5 Go!*** insists that group participation – though important – is not the desired end-result, but rather the beginning of the learning that takes place when it is followed by group synthesis and individual group members take ownership of the ideas.

Importantly, this system is not just for the compelling consultant or professional presenter.

3-4-5 Go! is designed for everyone.

2: Presentation versus discussion

Some learning sessions are all about the presentation. Good examples include a lecture by an expert or keynote presentation by a famous guest speaker. Other sessions may be all about the discussion, such as at a facilitated mission discernment retreat. However, in most instances presentation and discussion need to be balanced.

For ***3-4-5 Go!*** the presentation aspects are embodied in the 3 and the 4. The discussion aspects are contained in the 5 and the Go!

3-4-5 Go! is based on two cornerstones of human interaction:

- An audience won't get impatient or bored if the speaker talks for less than 5 minutes.
- An audience thinks a speaker is wonderful who brings them into the conversation, so they get to talk about themselves.

It's often said that the art of a great conversationalist is not talking too long and being a good listener. When we apply this wisdom to the art of presentation, we get ***3-4-5 Go!***

3: Preparation

Your session preparation has a 5-4-3-2-1 countdown. You have to prepare your 3 main points and your 5 questions about them. You have to practice (even write out) your remarks so they fit in 4 minutes. You also have to prepare a 1 page handout (see below) and you may either have to find a second panelist or prepare a second set of 3-4-5s.

3.1: 5 questions

What's with all the questions? Isn't this a task for the audience? Isn't the presenter's most important job preparing the presentation? Isn't the presentation the most important part of the session?

No, no, and no again. At least not when a key object of the session is facilitated discussion.

In many cases, except in certain academic conferences and sessions, the audience has not read pre-conference materials, nor are its members expert enough to ask the best questions. Rather much of the audience is still digesting the material, and reluctant to expose their incomplete understanding by being one of the first to comment or question. This is why many discussions fail to materialize.

Instead, it's important in ***3-4-5 Go!*** for the presenter to have open-ended questions that encourage all to voice an opinion.

One of the most basic questions is "What do you want to get out of this session?" Another asks each to relate a relevant experience that will illuminate the issue, because everyone knows about themselves – and likes to expound on that subject. This is also a way for people to think about the topic and the presenter's main points in terms of their own experience – and make it real and intuitive for them.

But why so many questions? After all, the presentation itself has only 3 key ideas. It's because two-thirds of the session time is spent in discussion! The presenter needs to spend twice as much effort on crafting intriguing issues to discuss as in the presentation that primes those discussions.

3.2: **4 minutes**

Keeping your presentation to 4 minutes requires discipline. But 4 minutes is more than enough time to make your points.

In 4 minutes, you can speak 450 words without rushing. That's a full page of text. It's quite a lot, especially if you are succinct – and prepared. However, it's easy to hem and haw interminably and say absolutely nothing of substance. If that is you, there's a solution:

- Know your material.
- Write out what you are going to say – on index cards if necessary.
- Memorize and practice it. And practice some more.
- If you can't memorize it, read it!

But if you must read it, don't read it off a Power Point slide or a full sheet of paper. That will keep your eyes glued to the screen or paper and off the audience. Instead use index cards, 2 cards per minute of presentation (with 40 to 90 words per card). That will help you keep your place, and make it easier to look up.

[*NOTE: It's true that many great extemporaneous speakers don't "get going" for the first 5 or 10 minutes of a presentation, but then can speak for hours. If you are one of them, you don't need **3-4-5 Go!***]

"But, what about spontaneity? What about natural delivery? What about eye contact with the audience?" Most great speeches these days are read off a teleprompter. There is nothing spontaneous about them. The "natural style" delivery is practiced. However, reading from the teleprompter allows eye-contact with the camera or audience. Most of us won't be delivering our presentations with the aid of a teleprompter. Simply stated, we need to compensate for that.

Remember: if you keep it short and speak less than 5 minutes, the audience will forgive just about anything.

3.3: **3 key points**

People remember things in "threes". We want memorable content. Let's make it easy for them.

If you have a seven point plan, you need discuss only three of them. Then refer the audience to your book, website, or handout for the rest.

There is a corollary to this rule of threes. To remember something most people must repeat it at least three times. A well-known precept for giving presentations is

- Tell people what you are going to say.
- Tell them.
- Tell them what you said.

For your 3 key points that means tell people what they are, explain them succinctly, then close with a reminder and reiteration of the three points.

With this built in repetition, you can't waste words or time. You get to wax eloquent, when the audience asks you questions.

3.4: **The 2s**

A. You may need two people or two sets of 3-4-5s. One ***3-4-5 Go!*** presentation will not provide enough material for a one-hour session. One person can use ***3-4-5 Go!*** to lead a compelling 20 – 25 minute session. A two-person panel discussion with each using ***3-4-5 Go!*** can run a 45 minute session.

If one person prepares several sets of 3-4-5s, he or she can lead a much longer session by using these sets one after the other.

B. Once we get to the Go techniques, 2 will figure in again, as the maximum amount of time for each paired interactive discussion.

C. You and the audience that's two. Focus on the second you'll be a success.

3.5: **1 handout on 1 page**

Every session needs a handout. It makes the experience real.

Handouts can be important post-session references. They can help attendees remember what they learned. Pre-session handouts can be important to prepare attendees to learn more deeply or participate more fully. Handouts can be used during a session to take notes, mark up passages, or highlight key points.

Importantly, if somewhat facetiously, handouts often act as an essential "prop". They are something for an attendee to bring back home as a reminder and "proof" – not only that he or she attended the session, but that the session was substantive and worth the time and expense of attending. This is reason enough to produce them.

A one-page handout for any session will accomplish all of this as much as a tome.

Nonetheless, if the conference has a number of sessions, compiling the handouts into a book – electronic or physical – adds import. Handing out a physical book, where each chapter is based on a short or one-page handout undoubtedly adds weight. Importantly, with print-on-demand technologies, a hard-copy paperback book may cost less to print than photocopying all of the individual handouts. A bound book will be perceived as having more value than a ream of loose leaf handouts or electronic ones. A bound book is sufficiently compact to carry home on the plane.

Handouts can provide (or even emphasize) ancillary and supplementary information. This may be particularly important for sessions that focus on sharing experiences. Otherwise, a day after an energizing or inspiring exchange a participant may remember the energy of the "high" but little of substance. And, when the high wears off, a participant may even begin to feel that the experience was empty.

4: **Action**

So you've done all the prep work and started the session with your opening remarks … then what?

Action! Discussion! *The hard part that we've been trying to avoid.*

Here is what to do.

4.1: Go

There are several ways to carry out the interactive discussion we seek in the “Go” part of this methodology. Some come under the rubric of Speed-Sharing, others under the system of Turn-and-Talk (or Think-Pair-Share). All strive for the person-to-person engagement that is usually lacking in a presentation format.

We want this engagement for a number of reasons. Participants become focused on the topic as they talk with each other. They become more invested in what is discussed. They internalize and retain more of the experience and information. They may become more curious about the topic, primed for exploring supplemental information, or interested in additional studies. When the session is about new ways of doing things, energized participants may become courageous enough to try them out.

Just as importantly, every conference is about networking. Indeed, the richest conference experiences often occur outside the meeting rooms. Including person-to-person discussion as part of each session begins making these connections and forming these networks – early and for everyone.

3-4-5 Go! adapts these methods to a setting with strangers.

4.1.1: Pairing strangers

It’s important that people sit next to others they don’t know, or don’t know well.

If people pair off with friends for the Turn-and-Talk activities described below, they are just as likely to talk about what they saw on TV last night as the 5 questions you have prepared to ask them.

Here are some ways to achieve this.

- Assign seats. This may be especially convenient if people are seated at tables. Put numbers on the tables. As people enter the room assign them to “random” tables by handing each a number.
- Take a seat, leave a seat. When people are seated in rows, in a circle, or around a table, ask everyone as they enter to take a seat next to someone they do not know – or leave a seat for someone they do not know.
- Ask people to switch seats. After people have been seated, but before they are settled, ask people to switch seats so that they are next to someone or even two people they do not know.

4.1.2: Introducing strangers

Introductions are important, because they break down the natural reticence of strangers to talk to each other. They also provide practice in getting to the point quickly.

At the beginning of the session, the presenter or panel of presenters can model this process by each introducing themselves in two sentences. For example, “My name is Ben Slotznick, I represent XXX.” Then have a moderator (or the lead panelist) conduct the right-and-left-hand partnering exercise below with pair-wise introductions.

However, if you go around the room, with everyone introducing each other, the introductions are likely to take up most of your session. This is why ***3-4-5 Go!*** limits introductions to the Right-and-Left-hand Partners discussed below.

You can even hold the first turn-and-talk discussion on the question, right there and then. We are getting a little ahead of ourselves, but after introductions and selecting Right-and-Left-hand Partners, use the question "What do you expect to get out of this session?"

4.1.3: Right-and-Left-hand Partners

3-4-5 Go! is intended for a setting such as an industry conference among strangers, where a multiplicity of discussion pairings is desirable, but they must be established quickly. In addition, the natural reticence among strangers to converse must be overcome.

The right hand partner. Ask everyone to stand and shake hands with someone. Take thirty seconds to introduce each other. This is their right hand partner.

The left hand partner. Ask everyone to turn and find another nearby partner. Shake hands with your left hand, instead of your right. Take thirty seconds to introduce each other. This is their left-hand partner.

Now the in-cue or discussion command (see below) is "Turn to your right-hand partner (or left-hand partner) and talk. Go!"

Sometimes you will want a topic to be discussed by both right-hand and left-hand partners. Sometimes by only one of the pairs.

4.1.4: Turn-and-Talk

Turn-and-Talk (also called Think-Pair-Share) is a teaching technique used around the world. It is a way to pair individuals to quickly generate discussion about any topic.

3-4-5 Go! uses a variation of this technique, so it is useful to review it:

- Every person has a pre-assigned partner seated nearby.
- A question is posed or discussion topic announced by the teacher/discussion leader.
- On command, all turn to their partners and discuss the topic.
- On command, the discussions end.

Optimal Talk-and-Turn sessions are short. Many proponents suggest 30 seconds to 2 minutes max. Variations include how to assign partners, how to initiate the conversations, how to end them, and whether to have multiple partners with serial conversations.

Perhaps it's easiest to understand by watching Talk-and-Turn in action. Check out this video from Teach Like a Champion: https://vimeo.com/70422433

Turn-and-Talk and ***3-4-5 Go!*** may be invoked several times during one session, so a pre-assigned partner not only saves valuable time initiating a session, but a regular partner reduces barriers and time in initiating a conversation between them.

4.2: !

After the Go, *after the one-on-one discussions*, there is a need to bring the discussion to the group – for analysis, further group discussion, and synthesis. There is a need to correct mistakes, rather than reinforce them. There is a need to bring everyone on-board and up to speed. There is a need for everyone to take ownership of what has been learned.

Both Turn-and-Talk and Speed-Sharing are great techniques for getting discussion going – and generating ideas. But practitioners of both have expressed concern that pair-wise conversation can be less than rigorous and that the actual learning of some may not extend to the whole group. Efforts have been made to articulate procedures so that insights from the paired chats are brought to the entire group to stimulate rigorous group discussion and group analysis. Most succinctly, the issue is how to report out from the individual discussions to the whole group, and engage the group in analysis of those discussions to facilitate group learning.

After all, the desired outcome is not generating facilitated discussion, but facilitating learning among everyone in the session.

4.2.1: **Synthesize with a Scribe**

After the Go, you've got to keep up the group's energy, but transfer from one-on-one discussion to group discovery that publishes and then punctuates the ideas and experiences that have been shared in pairs.

Doug Lemov has an interesting comment on his Teach Like a Champion blog. This comment, while written about Turn-and-Talk, applies to the Go portion of ***3-4-5 Go!*** as well:

> "Another way to think about Turn and Talk is as a prelude, a catalyst to some other activity: a whole-class discussion, written synthesis, a charting and comparison of ideas generated. The Turn and Talk's purpose is generative—let's get a lot of ideas going—the next activity's purpose is analytical—now let's figure out what makes sense and why.
>
> "So after a Turn and Talk it's important to take the ideas that were generated and analyze them in a public way, editing, revising, and prioritizing ideas so students see what was good, what was better and what, possibly, was wrong. And then, if you want, consider asking for some further processing, ideally in writing, to ensure that rigor and clarity emerge from the investment you've made." http://teachlikeachampion.com/blog/like-turn-talk-much-next-guy/#sthash.aSVoLLcj.5jipaREn.dpuf

While all such activities make sense in a classroom, many don't in a conference setting. But we can do much and create a proxy for them when we **Synthesize with a Scribe**. Here's how to use a scribe to share and synthesize the Go experience:

- Appoint a scribe from the audience to take notes, ideally on a flip-chart – even better on a sticky chart (the type where each sheet can be removed and "stuck" to a wall).
- Call on one member of each pair to report on the discussion points raised by both partners.
- After visiting all pairs, ask if any other viewpoints were raised.
- (Optional) Ask if there are any questions or open the floor to comments.
- Vote by show of hands on which were the three most important points. (Scribe marks with an X, a star or an asterisk.)

Wow! You've generated energy and discussion, achieved 100% participation along with selective group discussion, reinforced good points, debunked bad ones, charted and compared ideas … and you're only 4 or 5 minutes into the discussion period.

[*If you don't believe this, re-watch the video at* *https://vimeo.com/70422433.*]

So … What are you going to do for the rest of the session?

Do it again. That's why you prepared 5 questions.

Of course, the discussion can continue with Q & A, or veer off into a more focused discussion of one of the points already raised. If a point raises interesting and new questions, those can be the substance of the next invocation of Go rather than your pre-prepared questions.

4.2.2: **What next?**

When you've exhausted your questions, and pursued all the new ones, it's time for a sole presenter to conclude – or move on to the next topic he or she has prepared.

If there is more than one presenter, you have to decide whether to do all the opening remarks first and then do all the discussion, or if the first panelist has discussion before the second makes remarks. This will depend upon how integrated the panelists' remarks are. But in any case, make sure there is time for all panelists to deliver their remarks and lead some discussion.

4.3: **Concluding a session**

Save the last 3 to 5 minutes to wrap up the session.

You've just completed 5, 10 or 15 Turn-and-Talks. The group has voted on the most important three points for each. Now it's time to vote for the three most important points for the entire session.

A panelist, or the scribe can read the starred (or Xed) points out loud, then read them again and vote.

Congratulations! You've just concluded an exuberant facilitated discussion.

5: **Reporting out of the session**

If there is a summary of break-out sessions, a reporting during the plenary, then the scribe from each session can report the points that got the asterisks.

6: **Variations**

Rules are made to be broken. So yes, you can have 4 points instead of 3, talk for 5 minutes instead of 4, or only have 3 open-ended questions instead of 5. You can pair-off people differently, and have alternate "after Go" activities.

BUT, the essence of this presentation technique remains: (a) keep the presentation short, with a limited number of major points, (b) insist on face-to-face interaction among all members of the group, (c) ensure non-contentious group analysis, and (d) make sure that the latter two activities constitute 2/3 of the session time.

7: **Summation**

3-4-5 Go! is not just about giving a presentation – nor even primarily about facilitating discussion. It is about the end point of any teaching and learning process. It is about the Eureka moments, the exclamation points.

Keep that in mind. The name "3-4-5 Go!" is not just a pneumonic to remember the different parts of the methodology. It's designed as a reminder of this core principle.

The three themes of your presentation may be fundamental, but the questions you ask are even more important – and the discussion that results from them, even more important still. Yet … your presentation is only the beginning. The discussion is only a segue. In the end, it is the learning that matters.