

## Why use a professional focus group moderator?

*Excerpts for this document have been taken from a Position Paper prepared by the Professionalism Committee of the Qualitative Research Consultants Assoc., Inc., 1995.*

Conducting focus groups may look easy. And it may seem easy to those who have not been trained in the various tools and techniques true professionals use to explore feelings, attitudes and opinions of a pre-selected audience.

Professional moderators have honed a variety of competencies through years of study and practice. Their expertise enables these moderators to project an attitude of nonchalance, equanimity and calm, as well as effortless good humor, while conducting even difficult or very sensitive discussions.

For a synopsis of the value a professional moderator brings to conducting good market research, please see the tips below.

### **A professional knows how to:**

- Establish rapport with respondents
- Probe beyond rationalizations to uncover genuine motivations
- Interpret and build on what they hear
- Maintain flexibility in guiding the discussion without losing sight of the objectives
- “Turn on a dime” – adapt their approach when they and the clients encounter unexpected issues or insights
- Manage the energy level and personality dynamics of the discussion
- Avoid creating bias among respondents

### **A professional is prepared for challenging situations, and is able to:**

- Get around respondents' defensive behavior
- Effectively handle talkers and non-talkers
- Keep unexpected issues from sabotaging the discussion
- Notice contradictions that don't "ring true"
- Handle sensitive topics with diplomacy
- Recognize problem respondents and act appropriately

### **A professional brings:**

- Mastery of multiple techniques
- Experience in diverse disciplines
- Knowledge about relevant trends in other categories and industries

### **A professional does more than moderate. They also:**

- Help sharpen the focus and clarify the objectives of the research
- Ensure objectivity from the design stage through final analysis
- Stay focused on clients' business issues, to ensure the research findings are relevant and actionable
- Build a positive working relationship with clients
- Help keep the research team objective about the topic
- Stand up to pressure when necessary based on the research learning

### **A professional ensures high standards by:**

- Protecting client confidentiality
- Protecting respondent confidentiality and anonymity
- Staying committed to non-discriminatory recruiting
- Being considerate and respectful of respondents and their differences.