

# CHAT SHOW

/ Interactive storytelling in front of an audience /

## WHAT IS A CHAT SHOW?

The Chat Show (also called a Talk Show) is a meeting or workshop activity similar to a television talk show, with a host who interviews one or more guests. It is widely used as a dynamic and creative alternative to panel discussions, and is useful for sharing knowledge from guests who are experts or influential persons. A Chat Show usually focuses on a pre-selected theme. The key to the Chat Show's appeal is its informal approach to the Q&A process, which puts guests at ease while engaging the audience.

## REQUIREMENTS:

- *Host (facilitator; outgoing, engaging personality who is good at getting people to talk and thinking on their feet)*
- *3 - 5 guests (subject-matter experts, leaders, people with knowledge to share)*
- *Rapporteur*
- *Room (ideally with theatre-style seating)*
- *Microphones (lapel and wireless)*
- *Flipchart and marker pens (Optional: projector, for capturing key points on PowerPoint slide)*
- *20 - 50 people (larger audiences possible too)*
- *60 - 90 minutes*



## WHEN AND WHY TO USE

A successful Chat Show is one that creates a lively, congenial environment, putting guests at

ease, enabling them to share their thoughts and ideas without much preparation on their part. It sustains the interest of the audience and encourages them to participate as well. Best used in sessions that call for input from an expert panel, a Chat Show is a great substitute for lengthy presentations and is less intimidating than a panel discussion. A Chat Show can easily accommodate between three to five guests.

The Chat Show can be used for:

- ▲ **Introducing new concepts and ideas:**  
When there is resistance to new initiatives that

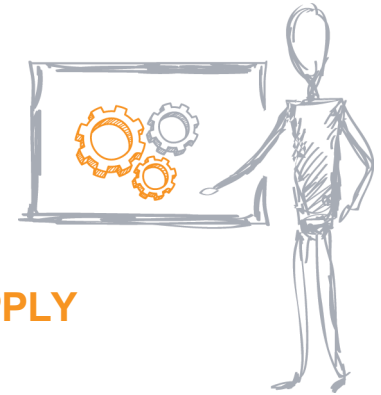
signal change, a chat show gives you the opportunity to inject transparency into the process, and thereby encourage the change process. With a skilled host at the helm, any topic can be explored in great depth.

▲ **Introducing new people:** Use chat shows to introduce new or prominent leaders/ staff. It has the potential to present them in a more appealing light and endear them to the audience. Guests also have a better chance of engaging with people in a relaxed environment.

▲ **Storytelling/Narrative:** The host uses questions to piece together a compelling narrative of the guests being interviewed. A creative alternative to case studies or project team reviews, a chat show can get beyond the standard responses. All it takes is an empathetic host to chip away at the obvious and get to the more meaningful experiences.

▲ **General knowledge sharing:** By doing away with the formality of presentations, a chat show can quickly get to the heart of what makes an expert or a panel of experts tick.

The main results of a successful Chat Show are learning and inspiration among all participants, as a basis for future improvement, especially when guests have shared lessons learned or experiences that can be re-used. Ideas presented during a Chat Show can form the basis for follow-up discussions later in a workshop. The recorded summary prepared by the rapporteur can sometimes be used directly for knowledge-sharing among others not present; this may require some editorial work. The primary goal remains informing and inspiring those who are actually present during the event.



## HOW TO APPLY

### Prepare in advance

#### 1. Choose a theme or topic and select 3 - 5 guests to be interviewed during the Chat Show.

You can choose either the theme or the guests first, but they should be complementary.

▲ If you have a particular theme already in mind – for example, the theme of a conference or initiative which you are supporting through the Chat Show – then define it clearly in a few words, and think of guests who could speak to it.

▲ If your goal is to introduce new people, then you already know the proposed guests. Define a theme/topic in a few words, tailored to their expertise and role.

▲ Guests should be experts with valuable knowledge, people with relevant and interesting professional experiences, or leaders in positions that are relevant for your audience. The best Chat Show guests are spontaneous, open to sharing and good at storytelling.

#### 2. Identify a host. Selection of the host is critical:

Success of the Chat Show depends on the host's ability to interact with the audience and guests. Hosts should be able to hold their own among the guests, be enthusiastic and should have some knowledge of the topic. Hosts should be skilled in the art of the question: anticipating what people want to know; asking interesting (and occasionally tough) questions without being confrontational; engaging the audience; thinking on their feet and

keeping the flow of conversation and energy going.

**3. Contact your proposed guests to brief them on the process:** Let them know that there will be no PowerPoint presentations or formal speeches, and that instead, they will be interviewed in front of an audience (of staff, partners, or whomever will participate in the event). Ensure they are willing to accept this, and let them know who the host will be. Give them time to reflect if needed, then get their agreement via email.

**4. Once the host and guests are chosen, invite them to a pre-meeting session to prepare for a successful Chat Show event:**

▲ Brief the host and guests on their roles. Let them know the rules: If you want an informal event, let them respond to each other's comments as per a real discussion/debate. Or if you prefer a formal tone, let the host act as moderator, and guests will respond only when called upon.

▲ Ask all guests to briefly describe their background and expertise, and encourage the host to ask questions. The goal is to enable the host to make short, interesting introductions of all guests at the event.

▲ Discuss at least some of the Chat Show questions, so that the guests have an idea of what to expect. Ensure that guests know their answers should be reasonably short and to the point. Questions should mostly be open-ended (i.e., they should require more than just a few words to answer). They should bring out the guests' most relevant experiences, most powerful lessons learned and personal tips on how

they solve problems, meet challenges and achieve success in the topic under discussion.

**5. Publicize the session.** Compose a short, compelling message about the event, and include the topic, who the experts are, when and where the session will take place, how to participate (e.g. just show up, or register in advance). Share it as appropriate: via direct email to individuals or mailing lists, broadcast emails, posting it on organizational social networks, putting up notices, etc., all depending on your desired participants. Then share a reminder a few days before the event.

▲ Optional: With your announcement you can invite questions from participants, and make a selection from these for the host to ask at the event.

### Set up the room

**6. An ideal venue has theatre or auditorium-style seating, with a stage in the front and the audience in a semi-circle facing it.** Alternatively, you can use any sufficiently large room: Arrange the chairs in rows in a semi-circle. At the front, place comfortable armchairs or sofas for the guests, and small tables with refreshments. The host may choose to sit with the guests or stand, depending on what the host is comfortable with.

### When you are ready to start

*These instructions are for the host, who has ideally been selected according to the criteria in #2 above.*

**7. Welcome the audience and give a 2 - 3 minute introduction of the guests touching on their relevant expertise.** You may include an interesting snippet or anecdote, e.g., "An expert in public health communication campaigning, my first

guest participated in successful polio eradication campaigns in 6 countries...”

**8. Provide a quick overview of the topic, then begin with questions for your guests – mostly open-ended, some prepared in advance, others spontaneous and arising from the conversation.** (See third bullet under #4 above for more advice on preparing questions.) Encourage the guests to share their experiences, gauge the audience’s understanding and appreciation of the topic being discussed and ask clarifying questions when needed. Ensure that each guest gets appropriate opportunity to respond to questions. If any guest begins straying into a lengthy monologue, intervene diplomatically to redirect the conversation.

**9. The rapporteur captures pertinent points as they arise in conversation.** This can be done in various ways: as keywords on a flipchart, as a mindmap displayed to the audience on paper or via a projector, or as words typed on a PowerPoint slide. Just make sure that the rapporteur’s activity does not distract from the Chat Show. Once the conversation is flowing, your role as host is to sustain it for the duration of the Chat Show:

- ▲ Ask the pre-determined questions when appropriate during the event, and intersperse them with spontaneous questions, balancing the opportunities for your various guests to respond.
- ▲ Ensure the conversations stay on topic.
- ▲ Summarize key points from time to time and more fully at the end.

▲ At intervals, you may turn to the audience and ask for reactions.

▲ Keep the energy level high by interspersing conversations with light banter to ensure the audience is attentive. Pay attention to how the audience is feeling and manage the situation accordingly.

▲ Where culturally appropriate, use humour. It puts guests at ease and it creates nice overall atmosphere.

**10. Keep an eye on time.** Depending on the chat show timing, i.e., 60 minutes or 90 minutes, allocate 10 – 15 minutes or 20 -30 minutes, respectively, for a concluding Q & A with the audience. Keep comments short and to the point, and use the rapporteur’s flipchart or mindmap to refresh their memory. (The rapporteur should continue recording the audience Q&A.) When ready to conclude, allow guests one final short comment that you frame by asking a specific “wrap up” question. Then conclude the Chat Show by thanking your guests for their time and contributions.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



▲ Microphones are important for ensuring a natural, audible conversation.

Use lapel mics for guests and have several wireless mics available for the audience, along

with a couple of assistants to walk the mics out to audience members during the concluding Q&A. This saves a lot of time, especially with larger audiences.

Alternatively, stand mics may also be placed at various spots strategically for the audience to use.

The host should use a wireless mic for easy movement.

If lapel mics are not available for the guests, then tables may need to be set up with standard wired mics. Be aware however that this will look more like a panel discussion than a Chat Show.

If your audience is small (20 persons or less), and the room acoustics are good, you may be able to do without microphones. It is best to test this out prior to the session: Ensure that a person in the back rows can easily hear a person at the front speaking without a microphone.

▲ The Chat Show can be run in a more formal manner if your guests or circumstances require it. But if you are looking for a change of pace from your usual meetings, then an informal approach is best.

For added effect, adapt a local or popular television talk show name and use it for your session.

Create some excitement by publicizing the Chat Show before it takes place. Place simple flipchart posters to generate interest or ask for questions via social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook or Yammer.

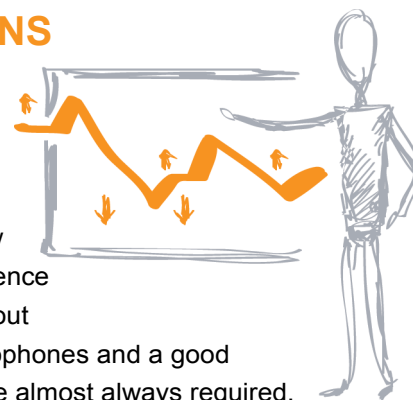
Set the stage to closely resemble a home living room so that guests feel relaxed. Avoid having a podium or conference table; instead use an

informal coffee table (with refreshments for guests) in front of the chairs, and arrange the chairs in a semicircle so that each guest can see the others as well as the host.

▲ The host should feel free to move around the stage if so inspired, or stand just off the stage between the guests and the audience and act as a conduit between the two, or just sit with the guests as per most TV talk shows.

## VARIATIONS

▲ **For large audiences:** To run a Chat Show for a larger audience of more than about 50 people, microphones and a good audio system are almost always required.



Ensure that all members of the audience have adequately comfortable seating with a clear view of the stage. If available, you can use a video camera and large screen to enhance visibility for persons towards the back of the room.

▲ **Buzz Group during audience Q&A:** Getting people to 'buzz' in plenary helps them come up with more meaningful questions for the experts; refer to the Buzz Groups tool in this Toolkit for full instructions on how to do this. Asking each Buzz Group to decide on one question helps filter out simple, obvious questions, improves quality and relevancy of the conversation and also ensures there is no lull in the process.

▲ **Expert Interview:** Similar to the Chat Show, the spotlight is on the subject-matter experts, except that the questions are asked directly by participants who come up on stage and sit two at a

time to pose questions of any of the experts seated there. See 'Expert interview with an audience' in this Toolbox for details.

▲ **Heterogeneous Fishbowl:** Given a topic having multiple distinct viewpoints, invite one person from each main viewpoint to sit in the Fishbowl. The ensuing discussions will be varied and will cover many facets of the topic.

▲ **Combine social media with Chat**

**Show:** If the technical capacity is available, then the Chat Show works well as a combined in-person and webcast event. If webcasting the event, ensure that the cameras are well-placed to capture the 'action'. Suggested questions can be requested in advance via social media from persons who cannot physical be present, or they can also be submitted online while the event is in progress; in this case, a second individual will need to monitor web channels and feed questions to the host on cards or via a mic.



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