

ATD CORE4 2026 · QUICK WINS

AI-Proof Facilitator Toolkit

Using EI to Lead Where Algorithms Can't

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The big idea

AI can write the recipe. You taste.

AI can draft the agenda, the role-play and the perfect reply in seconds. What it cannot do is feel the sting of a hostile comment and choose to stay in the room. That choice, made in the first few seconds and from self-awareness rather than a script, is the part of facilitation that can't be automated. It is also the part you can practise.

1

Know your hook

Name what push-back threatens in you, and how you behave when it does.

2

Pause · Play · Pass

Feel the sting and stay. Lean in with curiosity. Hand it to the room.

3

Rehearse before the room

Practise your hardest moments with AI as a sparring partner.

1. Know your hook

Everyone has a signature hook, the push-back that gets under their skin, and a tell: what they do when it does. Knowing both lets you choose your response instead of reacting. Which line makes your chest tighten?

Hook	What it protects	Push-back that lands	Common tells	Ask yourself
Competence	Being seen as capable	<i>"Have you actually done this in a real workplace?"</i>	Over-explaining, citing credentials, rushing through content (the Compliance Sprint)	Do I need to prove something right now, or can I just answer the question?
Control	The plan, and my role as the leader	<i>"Can we get back to the agenda?"</i>	Tightening the agenda, cutting discussion, talking faster	What am I afraid will happen if the plan bends?
Approval	Being liked; the warmth of the room	<i>"This is boring."</i>	Over-apologizing, adding energy or jokes, softening the message	Am I trying to win them over, or serve them?
Fairness & values	What feels right, or imposed	<i>"Why are we forced to be here?"</i>	Defending the organization or the process, or going quiet	What is this person right about?

Your worksheet

My hook is...	
My tell (and first bodily sign) is...	
My reset, in my own words, is...	

2. Pause · Play · Pass

Once you know your hook, this is the move. You have done all three before; the skill is doing them when you are hooked.

Pause

Feel the sting. Stay.

- One slow breath. Feet on the floor.
- Two seconds of silence. It lowers the tempo of the room.
- Notice your first thought (“they think I don’t know my stuff”) and let it pass.

Play

Lean in with curiosity or humour. Not defence.

- “Good question. Say more about what you’ve seen.”
- “Fair challenge. I’ll answer it; you tell me if it holds up in your world.”
- Humour lightens the moment, never the person.

Pass

Hand it to the room.

- “Who else has run into this?”
- “What would you add?”
- Turn the sharpest comment into a question for the group, and let them answer it.

The lines are the easy part. The pause is the skill. A line delivered without the pause sounds scripted, including every line on this page. Put each one into your own words before you use it.

3. Rehearse with AI, before the room

Pilots train in simulators; facilitators rarely rehearse the hostile moment. Use AI as your sparring partner before the room. Paste this in and fill in the brackets:

You are a role-play partner helping me practise facilitating under pressure. Play a skeptical participant in a mandatory workshop on [topic]. Your character: [describe: for example, experienced, sent by his manager, distrusts leadership, thinks soft skills are a waste of time].

Open with one challenging comment and stay in character. If I get defensive or rush, push a little harder; if I stay calm and curious, soften gradually. Keep the pressure realistic, not cruel.

After five exchanges, stop and debrief me: Where did I sound defensive or rushed? What might be my tell? What lowered the tension? Suggest one thing to try next round.

Keep it confidential. Use invented details. Never paste real names, client information or internal material into an AI tool.

4. Five psychological safety rituals

Learning means admitting what you don’t know in front of others. These small habits lower the social threat in the room.

- 1. Name the room.** In the first two minutes, say why people are here, especially if it’s mandatory. For example: “Some of you didn’t choose to be here, and I’d be wary too. Let’s see whether this time can earn its place.”
- 2. Offer real choice.** Let people choose how to take part: speak, write, pair up or pass.
- 3. Model not knowing.** Say “I don’t know, let’s find out” once, early, and mean it.
- 4. Protect the pause.** After a hard question, wait through five slow breaths before you rescue the room.
- 5. Close with a check-out.** Ask for one thing people are taking with them, or one thing still unresolved.

5. Reading the room

Attunement means noticing the micro-signals and naming them with care. Treat every cue as a hypothesis. Describe what you see, ask, and let people tell you what is true for them.

What you notice	A hypothesis, not a fact	An inquiry to try
A heavy silence after your question	The question feels risky, or unclear	<i>"It's gone quiet. Would it help if I asked that differently?"</i>
A shared glance between two people	There may be a common reaction to what was just said	<i>"I might be missing something. What's going through people's minds?"</i>
Arms crossed, leaning back, no eye contact	Guarded, or simply tired	<i>"What would make this hour more useful for you?"</i>
A sudden slump or a sigh	Fatigue, or a reaction to the content	<i>"Let's take thirty seconds. What's on your mind?"</i>
An anxious laugh or a quick joke	Discomfort with the topic	<i>"That got a reaction. What made it funny, or uncomfortable?"</i>

Try the pattern: "I'm noticing _____. I might be wrong. What's happening for you?"

6. A four-week practice plan

This is learnable. It took me years of practice, and small steps repeated are what work.

Week 1: Notice	After each session or tense meeting, note which hook fired and what your tell was. Two minutes, no analysis.
Week 2: Pause	Take one slow breath before answering any challenge, in meetings and at home as well as in workshops.
Week 3: Rehearse	Run two ten-minute rounds with the AI sparring prompt. Write down your tell after each round.
Week 4: Use it live	Choose one real moment to Play and Pass. Debrief it with a trusted colleague.

About the speaker

Erika Skita, LL.M., CPHR, CTD, is an L&OD consultant, training facilitator, speaker and organizational coach. She is an EI-certified professional and has taught emotional intelligence for over 16 years.

If this was useful, tell me what you notice when you try it. Find me on [LinkedIn \(Erika Skita\)](#), at Your Brave Era (yourbraveera.ca, erika@yourbraveera.ca), or come and tell me your toughest room.