Celebrity Interview

Idea In Short

When a leader or expert needs to address a shared challenge, replace a long presentation with a structured interview. Celebrity Interview pairs a prepared host with a guest whose experience can illuminate the issue, then gives participants time to generate their own questions. Prepare prompts that invite stories, concrete decisions, and lessons learned. Keep the introduction short and make clear why the guest's experience matters to the audience. Use small-group reflection to widen question generation before the host selects follow-ups. The format should create honest exchange, not an uncritical endorsement of the guest or a spectacle that leaves the audience passive.

A leader may be invited to speak about a major change, yet the audience often hears a polished account that leaves little room for the questions people actually have. Celebrity Interview turns a presentation into a facilitated conversation. A host interviews a leader or expert about a shared challenge, asks for concrete examples, and then invites participants to develop additional questions. The format makes experience more accessible while giving the audience an active role. The guest's prominence is less important than the relevance of their experience. The Liberating Structures practice is designed to build trust by bringing people closer to a candid account of the work.

Prepare for a real conversation

The host and organizer should agree on the challenge the interview will address. Prepared questions can create a coherent path through the subject, but they should invite stories rather than easy summaries. Ask the guest about a decision they had to make, what information they lacked, what surprised them, and what they would change with hindsight. Questions should not be trivial or purely promotional. Sharing questions in advance can help a guest prepare for topics that require care, while preserving enough flexibility for follow-up.

The introduction should be brief. Explain why the conversation matters to the audience, introduce the guest, and clarify the flow. A long biography or a sequence of laudatory statements can reinforce status differences and use time without adding insight. The host should establish a conversational tone in which the guest can describe uncertainty as well as success. If the event is online, decide how questions will be submitted and how the guest will see or hear the audience.

Use the interview to surface decisions

The host asks prepared questions for roughly 15 to 30 minutes. Strong follow-ups encourage concrete detail: What did you do first? Who did you consult? What alternative did you reject? What did the team learn? Such questions help participants understand how a decision unfolded, instead of hearing only its polished conclusion. The interviewer should listen for a point that deserves deeper exploration and be willing to depart from the prepared list when the conversation reveals something important.

A useful interview does not become an interrogation or a testimonial. The host should let the guest complete a thought, ask for clarification when an answer remains abstract, and make room for complexity. An audience may need to hear what did not work or which assumptions changed. Balanced inquiry does not require inventing artificial criticism; it asks for an honest account of the challenge and the choices made.

Bring the audience into the exchange

After the interview, participants generate new questions through individual reflection, pairs, and small groups. This step gives people a moment to think before they compete for a microphone. They can write questions on cards, use a shared digital chat, or submit them through a tool the host can review. The host selects a few questions that are relevant to the group’s purpose and may combine duplicates. The audience should know how its questions will be handled.

The question-generation stage broadens participation beyond those comfortable speaking in front of a large room. It can also surface topics the host did not anticipate. The interviewer may need to group questions by theme, choose a sequence, and ask a follow-up that makes the answer useful to participants. If the guest cannot answer a question, the host can acknowledge the limit and identify a path for follow-up rather than pressuring the guest to

speculate.

Manage status and expectations

A “celebrity” can be a senior executive, respected practitioner, or expert whose experience is relevant to the challenge. The role should not imply that the person’s account represents everyone’s experience or settles a contested issue. The audience needs room to question, interpret, and apply what it hears. The host can make this explicit by framing the guest as one source of learning and asking participants what resonated, what differed from their experience, and what they want to investigate further.

The format calls for a group of at least about twelve and generally takes 30 to 55 minutes. In person, arrange a visible conversation area with microphones if needed, plus cards for audience questions. Online, small breakouts can replace pairs or quartets. If the guest is discussing a sensitive topic, clarify what can be shared and what boundaries apply. A structured interview is not a substitute for a formal consultation process when a decision requires broader participation.

Celebrity Interview is useful when launching a new initiative, welcoming a leader, or drawing lessons from a significant event. It can make a dry briefing more human by inviting a narrative of choices and consequences. Research on storytelling and leader communication suggests that concrete narratives can help people make sense of organizational change, while employee voice research stresses the importance of giving audiences a route to raise questions. 1, 2, 3

Translate insight into action

After the closing question, ask participants what they learned that affects their work. A short reflection can surface questions the interview answered, assumptions it challenged, and actions that deserve a closer look. If the guest offers a commitment or an answer that requires follow-up, record who will respond and by when. The session should not end with a thank-you alone if participants need a next step.

Celebrity Interview works when the guest is willing to engage, the questions matter to the audience, and the format gives participants room to contribute. It can enliven an event without making the expert the only source of knowledge. The host’s preparation and

listening make the difference between a promotional conversation and a useful exchange. Participants leave with a clearer view of how an experienced person approached a real challenge and a chance to decide what that experience means for their own work.

- 1The power of storytelling in business
- 2Employee voice and engagement
- 3Communicating during organizational change

Summary

Celebrity Interview can make expertise more accessible by focusing attention on a leader’s or practitioner’s choices, experiences, and uncertainties. The interviewer helps the guest tell a concrete story, while participants develop questions that matter to their work. A strong session leaves people with insight they can apply or challenge, rather than simply admiration for a prominent person. Hosts should prepare thoughtful prompts, protect time for audience questions, and avoid treating the guest’s views as unquestionable. Use the practice to launch an initiative, welcome a leader, or learn from an important event, then identify how participants can act on what they heard.