

HOW TO CONDUCT A MEETING

One of the biggest complaints about most organizations is meetings . . . they waste too much of our precious time. This is bad news for organizations. Meetings are important because that is where an organization's culture and climate perpetuates itself. Meetings are one of the ways that an organization tells its workers: "You are a member." If you have bad, boring, and time-wasting meetings, then the people begin to believe that this is a bad and boring company that does not care about time. Likewise, great meetings tell the workers, "This is a GREAT organization to be working for!" Also, remember that bad meetings lead to more bad meetings which cost even more money.

Why are there so many bad meetings? Poor planning by the meeting's organizer and a lack of involvement by the participants. Listed below are some guidelines for conducting effective meetings.

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

1. Define the objectives and desired outcomes. Know what you are trying to achieve by having a meeting.
2. Determine if a different activity could be used besides a meeting. A lot of wasted meetings are called when a couple of phone calls, e-mail or one-on-ones would have worked better.
3. Determine topics to cover and the best format for the discussion of each one. Know what you want to get accomplished by the meeting.
4. Estimate the length of the meeting. People need to know how long to plan for the meeting.
5. Create an agenda that is carefully scripted.
6. Deliver agenda in advance so that the participants have time to plan and prepare for the meeting.
7. Make every meeting a learning event: incorporate creative and cutting edge education on a topic.
8. Use a variety of tools and activities to make the meeting productive and fun . . . get them charged up!

PREPARE TO ATTEND A MEETING (for participants)

1. Know the purpose of the meeting. Know what your purpose for attending is.
2. Gather all data that you need to bring to the meeting.
3. Know the agenda of the meeting and ensure your agenda coincides with the meeting agenda.
4. Know your role and the path that you are going to follow.
5. Arrive on time and be prepared to stay until at least the planned stop time.
6. Take the meeting seriously, but do have some fun while attending.

SET UP THE MEETING PLACE

1. Select a physical setting that is comfortable, big enough, and will serve the purpose.
2. Create a warm and attractive atmosphere conducive to interaction.
3. Provide appropriate refreshments.
4. Have appropriate visual aids and learning aids on hand.
5. Always do something a little different and new. Make them glad that they came.

ASSIGN A NOTE TAKER (MINUTES)

1. Who attended.
2. What problems were discussed.
3. Key decisions reached.
4. Next steps: who needs to accomplish a task, start and end date of task and what is exactly needed.

START THE MEETING

1. Communicate the purpose and desired outcomes to all participants.
2. Clarify the type of participation and interaction desired.
3. Set the ground rules: when the meeting will end, how each member will be heard, what is expected.
4. Show that you value their ideas, opinions and questions.

CONDUCT THE MEETING

1. Take time to tell and hear stories.
2. Clarify and paraphrase key ideas.
3. Ask for different points of view; protect new ideas.
4. Use brainstorming techniques.
5. Record ideas and notes on a flip chart.
6. Stay focused on the agenda topics. Do not wander off topic or become distracted.
7. Assign next steps throughout the meeting. Make all next steps specific assignments.

KEEP THE MEETING FOCUSED AND MOVING

1. Get information and data from the meeting. Ensure all people are heard.
2. Let the people carry the content; you guide the process.
3. Acknowledge and reinforce constructive contributions.
4. Use the agenda to stay on track.
5. Vary the pace: speed up, slow down, take breaks.
6. Keep the group aware of where they are in the process.
7. Periodically summarize key points and ask for agreement.
8. Help the group reach consensus and reach conclusions.