

How to Improve Your Meetings

APPLICATION

Very broad. Everybody attends lots of meetings. And most of us, in general, don't like them.

INTRODUCTION

Meetings are one of the best candidates for organizational improvement. Surveys of managers have consistently shown that they feel half the time they spend in meetings is wasted. With typical middle managers report that they spend between 30 to 50 percent of their time in meetings, the opportunity to be much more efficient is striking. Think about it, if you are a typical manager who spends one third of your time in meetings, and if the effectiveness of meetings you attend increased from a paltry 50 to only 75 percent, you would pick up a month of free time to spend on other more important activities.

INSIGHT

"The commonly heard complaint about having to attend too many meetings, is really a statement about poor meeting quality. No one has ever complained about attending a good meeting where much was accomplished."

- J. Hauptert

IMPORTANT TIPS

Become a demanding boss regarding your meetings. Insist on structure and discipline. Recognize that poor meetings waste not only lots of money, but loose opportunities. You will need to transform the mindset that you and your people have about meetings. Examine the faulty thinking most of us have about meetings - We "go to meetings" and "sit in meetings." This is passive, not active. Meetings need to be an active forum where everyone comes prepared to fix things or move something forward. With the advent of email, Facebook and the like, and electronic bulletin boards, we don't need meetings to keep us informed. It's time to toss the weekly update (which is really just an extension of third grade show and tell) and rethink the purpose of your meetings.

KEY POINTS

1. **Agenda** - Always create and publish the agenda prior to the meeting. A well-defined agenda should drive the meeting activities. Follow the agenda ruthlessly and don't deviate unless the group agrees that you need to do this. Don't allow drift.
2. **Include Times** - Review the agenda as the first item and assign times to the activities. Appoint a member as the "Time Keeper" who will give the group periodic alerts on schedule. This person should issue verbal alerts such as two minute warnings.
3. **Deliverables** - Next, agree to the expected deliverables in this meeting. The purpose and expected outcomes of the meeting must be clearly defined and agreed upon. Always write the deliverables down in a public area for review at the end of the meeting. If you don't hit these, your meeting is a failure.
4. **Assign Homework** - Don't waste meeting time on people thinking about things. Thinking is great but this should be done offline beforehand. Members need to come prepared with ideas and solutions to discuss. At the start of the meeting, members should be polled for level of preparation.
5. **The Scribe** - Good meeting produce notes that provide a public record what was covered, with agreements, and assignments. The "Scribe" should not be the meeting leader. This assignment should go to an apolitical party with good writing skills.
6. **The Stuckee** - Accountability for action is vital. Clearly assign who is the "Stuckee" for each item that requires action or follow-up. But only one stuckee per item for clear accountability. When you review old business early in the meeting (yes this still needs to be done) call on the stuckees for updates.
7. **No Observers** - Member's roles must be clearly defined and agreed upon. Why is each person in the room? What is expected of them? Disintermediate anyone who does not add value. I hate meeting "observers." Copy them in on the meeting notes.
8. **Select a Structure** - Different types of meetings require different roles and structure. The structure and process must fit the purposes of the meeting. Identify the type of meeting this will be in the agenda. Is this a Design Review or a Brainstorming meeting? Is this a Trouble Shooting meeting or a Staff Review? See [Download Free Management Tools](#) for more information.
9. **Post Your Rules** - Clearly defined rules of operation should be determined and agreed to. These should be posted on the wall and referred to periodically. Example: If you are brainstorming post the rule "No criticizing or debating ideas."
10. **Participation** - This is not only desirable - it is a necessary component for success. The leader should tactfully pull in all passive members and solicit their opinions. Members should be encouraged and required to input to the meeting

content and process consistent with their role. Constructively confront, outside the meeting, individuals who have a history of passivity and negotiate for different behavior.

11. **Outcomes are King** - The primary role of the leader(s) is to focus on one thing - outcomes. Outcomes are the justification for holding the meeting. Have you moved the bar forward? Did you agree to solutions? Did you make assignments that will result in real action? If not, your meeting failed. Note that we don't think "show and tell" and "status" is an outcome.
12. **Process is Important** – this is the enabler of good outcomes. Since it is difficult to monitor both outcomes and process at the same time, it isn't a bad idea for the leader to appoint a "facilitator" (a senior member) who will monitor process while you the leader focuses on outcomes. There must be a balance between the content in the meeting and the meeting process. Good ideas thrive in an open and balanced conversational flow.