



Helping Organizations Define and Develop Top Talent

## How to Run an Effective Business Meeting

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How productive are your business meetings? Would you describe the culture that governs your meetings to more resemble World War III or crazy chaos? During a meeting, do you focus on the agenda at hand or do you concentrate more on breaking a foam cup into bits? Would you qualify eating all of the donuts in a meeting as a major accomplishment in your agenda? If these meeting scenarios sound familiar to you, you are not alone! Many studies have shown that more time is wasted in meetings than in any other business activity. It is estimated that people spend 20-40% (upper management is much more) of their time in meetings and that meetings are only 44-50% efficient (source: Steve Kaye). By improving the efficiency of your next meeting, you may increase *your* bottom line.

The first step in improving the efficiency of your business meetings is to recognize that meetings are a collaborative effort. The very definition of a meeting is a **TEAM** activity where **SELECT** people gather to perform **WORK** that requires **GROUP** effort. All participants of a meeting, therefore, must play a role in remaining focused and progressing through the meeting in a timely manner.

Before calling a meeting, it must first be decided whether it is necessary. Remember a meeting is not always the most effective way. Other options available might be sending a memo or an email. It is the responsibility of the meeting solicitor to determine the need for calling the meeting and who should attend. In general, it is best to invite as few participants as possible (key players only). The solicitor must also review the organization's calendar, reserve the meeting room and assign a meeting facilitator to be in charge of the agenda.

Effective meetings necessitate leadership. Leading a meeting requires attention, confidence, creativity, diplomacy, empathy, flexibility, wits, toughness and yes, humor! The primary role of the leader is to establish the ground rules for the meeting which are namely: to minimize confusion and disruptions and to institute a code of conduct. Some examples of team game rules that are designed to make meetings more effective are:

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1. If you are planning to introduce a proposal or discuss an issue in a group meeting, send out any relevant information to all team members several days before the meeting.
2. Review the agenda and bring any relevant materials with you to the meeting so that we can make informed decisions.
3. Don't lobby a few members before the meeting and try to ram an idea down the throats of the rest of the group in a "surprise attack". Keep issues above-board and inclusive. "Fight fair".
4. Come to the meetings on time.
5. If you are going to be absent, inform others beforehand and send a stand-in who can make at least some decisions in your name.
6. Focus on listening and seeking understanding before disagreeing.
7. If you are the recorder, distribute complete and accurate minutes to everyone within 48 hours after the meeting.
8. If you agree to something, do what you say you will do. Be accountable to each other.
9. Sarcasm, personal attacks, interrupting, dominating the discussion, or engaging in distracting behavior during a meeting are all non-productive behaviors. We agree not to engage in them.
10. It is okay to disagree during a meeting, but once the group has made a decision, it needs to be supported by everyone outside of the meeting. Passive resistance, sabotage, negative gossip and guerrilla warfare are not okay.
11. Remember to celebrate successes and to thank members for their efforts.

In addition to implementing these concepts, an effective meeting leader must enforce a code of conduct in order to maintain a safe environment for discussing ideas. The meeting facilitator should compel the meeting attendees to follow some simple guidelines to ensure an orderly meeting:

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- Work as a team
- No rank in the room
- One speaker at a time
- Be an attentive listener
- Focus on the issue
- Respect others
- Suspend judgment
- Allow curiosity
- Maintain confidentiality

It is as equally important to end a meeting efficiently as it is to conduct it. Besides just ending a business meeting on time there should be a review of agenda items and results, as well as assignments. A set agenda for the next meeting should also be prepared.

Having an effective business meeting is a key ingredient to having a successful business. If you would like more information on this subject, please feel free to contact us.

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