

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS



When it comes to getting things done, we need fewer architects and more brick layers.
Colleen C. Barrett

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Most people dread meetings because they are unproductive and don't achieve objectives. Here's what you can do to improve your meetings:

BEFORE THE MEETING

1. Ask yourself if the meeting is necessary or if there is a better or easier way of achieving your objective.
2. Plan your agenda. Your meeting plan should state the purpose, items, time as well as the process.
3. Unless it is a weekly staff meeting, invite key people only. People who don't have an interest in or knowledge of the subject matter will throw you off track or slow you down.
4. Send the agenda to participants a few days in advance to enable them to prepare.
5. Ensure that people who need to be present to make decisions can attend. If they can't attend, reschedule the meeting. Inform people in advance of the objective and agenda. Ask them to come prepared to deal with agenda items.
6. Book a meeting-room if necessary and make sure it has all the right equipment.

AT THE MEETING

1. Work through the agenda, item by item. Make sure that each item is complete before moving to the next.
2. Get organized. Ask someone to keep time, another to keep the minutes and to record key ideas on a flip chart.
3. Confirm the objective, time and process. Get agreement to these items.
4. If your group doesn't stick to one topic at a time, make them aware of the problem and give them the responsibility to keep on track.

5. Establish ground rules (code of conduct), especially if the meeting content is likely to inflame passions. For example, the group might agree to
 - a. listen to one another
 - b. respect all ideas
 - c. give everyone a chance to express opinions
 - d. make decisions by consensus
6. While you can remind people of their agreement if the ground rules are not being adhered to, you can appoint a 'sergeant at arms' to help you.
7. Keep on track. If people begin unrelated discussions, remind them of the objectives. If necessary, offer to put an item on the agenda for the next meeting or deal with it at the end of this meeting, time permitting.
8. Hand out supporting materials when the related item is being discussed. If you provide them at the start of the meeting, participants tend to read them and be distracted from the agenda item.
9. Keep everyone involved. Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate and that no one dominates the discussion.
10. Keep the meeting flowing by getting agreements or by asking questions such as:
 - a. How does everyone feel about that?
 - b. What's next on the agenda?
 - c. Are there any other opinions on this?
 - d. Can we move to the next item?
 - e. Have we all agreed to this?
 - f. How much time do we have left?
 - g. How will we deal with this issue?
11. Before wrapping up, ensure that each decision has an action. Ask for a volunteer to do each item by a specific date. A.s.a.p. is not a specific date. It merely indicates that the activity will be done some time in the future.
12. At the end of the meeting, summarize the content so that everyone is clear about what has been covered.

AFTER THE MEETING

1. Send minutes to each person. Also post them on your bulletin board for others to see.
2. Remind people who have committed to do something of their responsibility by highlighting their action items in their copy of the minutes.

MEETING CHECK-LIST

To ensure good meetings, keep a score sheet to provide you with feedback after the meetings.

Before the meeting did you:	Yes	No
Inform the right people of the time and place?	___	___
Prepare on points of discussion?	___	___
At the start of the meeting did you:		
Agree to an objective with the participants?	___	___
Agree how the meeting would be run? (Process)	___	___
Agree on a time limit?	___	___
During the meeting did you:		
Ensure the agenda was visible?	___	___
Follow the agenda?	___	___
Keep on track?	___	___
Keep everyone involved?	___	___
Get agreements when necessary?	___	___
Listen carefully?	___	___
Record all key ideas?	___	___
At the end of the meeting did you		
Summarise	___	___
Set an action plan	___	___
Things we want to do better/different at the next meeting:		

ATTENDING OTHER PEOPLE'S MEETINGS

By being active, enthusiastic and focused at meetings you are not chairing, you will help yourself and others.

BEFORE THE MEETING

1. Find out the purpose of the meeting by reading the agenda. If it is not clear beforehand, suggest strongly that outcomes be established prior to the meeting. If you have not received an agenda before the meeting or at the start, suggest that one be established.
2. If time is a problem for you, ask the chairperson if you are needed throughout the meeting. If not, you could arrange to participate during a certain portion of the meeting only.
3. If the duration of the meeting is unclear, find out how long it is expected to last. Let the chairperson know how much time you are able to spend at the meeting.

AT THE MEETING

1. Be on time - always.
2. Sit opposite the chairperson. Your eye contact will make it possible for you to respond often and be influential in decisions that are made.
3. Participate enthusiastically. By offering to keep minutes, record ideas on the flip-chart or help in any other way, you will set an example of commitment.
4. Help to keep the meeting as brief as possible. Strategies to achieve this include
 - a. glancing at your watch if the discussion is dragging on
 - b. offering to keep the time for each portion of the agenda
 - c. letting the chairperson know if the meeting is falling behind
 - d. summarizing to bring matters to a close
 - e. asking which items are left to deal with
 - f. asking whether your presence is required for the remaining issues

- g. asking whether a decision can now be made on the item under discussion
5. If the discussion goes on endlessly, you can help shorten it by asking if someone could summarize. Or ask if the points being discussed have already been mentioned.
 6. Help the chairperson stay on track by keeping people focused. If the discussion wanders, ask politely what the issue has to do with the subject at hand, or whether the matter could be dealt with later.
 7. Avoid starting or participating in side discussions. They distract others from the issues being dealt with and cause a lack of focus.
 8. Listen closely to the various points of view. Show support for the ideas of others.
 9. If confusion exists in the meeting, ask clarifying questions. For example, say, 'I'm confused. Can someone summarize what we're talking about (or what we've agreed to)?'
 10. At the end of the meeting ask for a summary, if the chairperson has not done so. A summary will confirm how well your time was spent as it will reflect the extent to which the objective has been achieved.

MANAGING PEOPLE

Achieving your meeting objectives will be possible only if you successfully manage the people involved. Since there is a variety of behavior that occurs in the meeting, there are many ways to deal with each.

DEALING WITH LATECOMERS

Close the meeting room doors and start at the specified time. Start no matter who is in the room and do not recap for latecomers. You don't want to penalize those who arrived on time for the sake of those who did not. One manager I know puts a jar labeled "Latecomers Fund" next to the meeting room door. Tardy Attendees contribute R5 for every minute they are late!

DEALING WITH AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

1. Remain calm. Showing your anger allows aggressive people to feel that they have successfully caused you to lose your composure.
2. If people want to discuss a problem not on the agenda, but which they need to get off their chest, let them vent their feelings for a short while. If their issue is legitimate, albeit off topic, show empathy by agreeing. When they are finished, ask if they are done, and if so, whether you can proceed with the topic at hand.
3. Don't allow people to use your meeting for their own political agendas. If their tone of voice is hostile and they begin to hijack your meeting, intervene as soon as they stop for a breath and point out firmly but politely that the matter may be important, but that this is not the meeting at which it will be addressed.
4. If people are totally out of line, making exaggerated claims or suggesting ridiculous ideas, don't enter into a debate with them. Canvass their peers to confirm that they alone hold that view. If there is general agreement that the hostile person's argument is invalid, confirm this by saying 'Well, it looks as if no one agrees with you, so why don't we agree to discuss this later.' Then move on to closure and the next item on the agenda.
5. Sometimes a person's aggressive behavior in a meeting is symptomatic of another problem. Try and find out the cause of the anger, dealing with it as quickly as you can. This can be done inside the meeting, if the issue is relevant or outside, if it is not.
6. Take the person aside at a break or at the end of the meeting. Share your observations and frustrations. Ask the person for his or her support in making the next meeting more productive.

DEALING WITH QUIET AND WITHDRAWN PEOPLE

1. Invite participation by maintaining eye contact and directing questions at them periodically.
2. Use the person's name when asking questions so no one else can answer.
3. Ask questions the person should be able to answer to encourage self-esteem.

4. Sit opposite the quietest person so that your conversation can be directed to that individual.
5. Make quiet people feel useful. Give them jobs that will increase their visibility. The role of recorder will ensure that the person is standing up while canvassing ideas from the group.
6. Get their opinions on issues by asking questions requiring a 'yes' or 'no' response. Praise them without appearing patronizing if they expand on their ideas.
7. Give them advance notice of subjects to be dealt with in the meeting so that they can collect their thoughts.
8. Canvass their ideas one-on-one outside of the meeting. If necessary, express their idea to the group, giving them credit for it.

DEALING WITH PEOPLE WHO DOMINATE MEETINGS

1. Many of the same techniques you use to deal with shy people can be used in reverse with someone who has little time for the ideas of others:
2. Sit next to the person and keep eye contact to a minimum.
3. Look at everyone but the dominator when posing questions to the group.
4. Outside of the meeting, point out the problem while expressing your appreciation for the input. Ask for help in keeping everyone involved.
5. Interject when the person stops to catch a breath. You can say, 'Thank you. What other opinions are there?'
6. Indicate your desire to get a variety of opinions before you ask a question.
7. Get opinions in sequence (round-robin), reaching the dominant person last.

DEALING WITH PEOPLE WHO SIDE-TRACK MEETINGS

1. Post the meeting objectives where all can see them. Before the meeting begins, obtain agreement to stick to the agenda.
2. Ask how the issue is related to the subject under discussion.
3. Interrupt when the person takes a breath, with a comment such as 'Thank you, but it appears as if we are on to something else. Could we agree to get back on topic?'

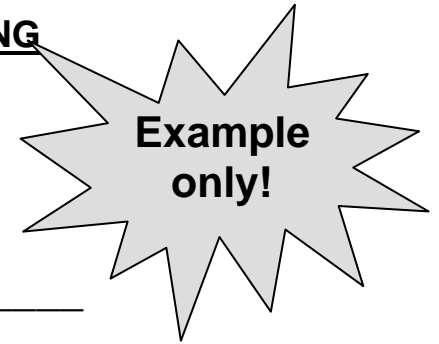
4. Allot a 'parking lot' on a flip chart to record issues unrelated to the meeting. Agree to deal with these issues later.

SETTING AN AGENDA

1. An agenda is like a road map that will get you from A to B in the shortest possible time. Having a meeting without a plan is a formula for disaster. Here are some tips on how to develop your next agenda:
2. Record meeting goals on paper. Be clear about what you want to achieve.
3. Write out the steps or activities necessary to attain each of your goals.
4. Analyse every step to identify whether it involves
 - a. presentation of information
 - b. feedback from participants
 - c. problem solving
 - d. decision making
 - e. planning
5. Identify a process (method) to achieve results for each activity. Record the method in a separate column.
6. Estimate how much time each item on the agenda will take up. This should be a lot easier now that you have a method or process.
7. Allow for a minute or two to get organized. You will want to appoint or get volunteers to be a timekeeper, secretary and recorder for the flip-chart. While this is typically done at the meeting, it can be done beforehand to save time.
8. Record on your agenda the attendees, starting and finishing times and location.
9. Allow time at the end for
 - a. developing action plans for decisions taken
 - b. summarising the meeting
 - c. evaluating the meeting
10. Circulate your agenda at least two days in advance so that people can plan to attend and prepare their ideas.

YOUR PRACTICE NAME

AGENDA FOR WEEKLY STAFF MEETING



Date:

Branch:

Present:

1. Minutes of previous meeting discussed:

2. Frontline discussion:

3. Dispensing Issues:

4. Optometrist Discussion:

5. Debtors – age analysis present

current _____ %

30 days _____ %

60 days _____ %

90 days _____ %

>90 days _____ %

Debtors discussion

6. Internal Marketing

7. Current Promotions

8. Workshop

