



Four steps to better meetings



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One - do you need to hold a meeting at all?

Meetings use a great deal of time in some companies, so first do a cost-benefit analysis - who will benefit from this meeting and how?

Two - set the meeting's purpose

The reason for getting people together is that there are unanswered questions - so clarify what those are and keep those meeting questions at the front of your mind. Now you have a purpose, stick to it.

Start the meeting by setting out why you are there, what you want to achieve and when the meeting will end. Make it clear there is no time for wandering off-topic.

As with all activities be sure to rehearse this opening speech out loud, several times. Get a friend to be the audience and do it 'for real' - no stopping, keep going as if it was a live meeting. When you have it right in your own mind, write it down and stick to it.

No one ever makes progress in a chosen direction unless they know what it is, and setting it out for the others in the room will prime them to get thinking in that direction. Try "This meeting is to decide what to do about a, b and c. We'll start by looking at what we know, then invite ideas and come to a decision" (Obviously you will customise that!)

Three - build a supergroup

Some meetings are full of energy and people collaborate to make new things happen. This is great - but how do you enable it?

First of all, let them talk - in many meetings the person 'in charge' will talk for about half the time, and there isn't much point in most people being there. Try getting someone else to manage your meetings so you can listen, observe and learn.

Whoever is facilitating should speak no more than is needed to keep the meeting on track. This means keeping the meeting moving towards answers to the meeting questions. They should encourage everyone to contribute, and be ruthless in culling conversation that goes off-topic.

The answers have to be framed in concrete terms - no jargon, waffle, vague aspirations or abstract ideas. We need to know who is going to do what, why, for whom, by when, and using what.

Every time an answer is formulated, the facilitator should thank the group, acknowledge the people who contributed, summarise it and write it down. Be sure that everyone in the room has heard the

same version of the answer, and get those responsible for following up the actions to agree publicly that they have that responsibility.

Four - give feedback as soon as possible

Circulate minutes the next day, and make sure they are a brief record of the event in plain English. Focus on the actions - who is going to do what, why, for whom, by when, and using what.

If you want to give people a brief window for comments, etc that's fine, but if you followed the steps above there should be no changes requested from people who were in the room.

This should allow you to start the next meeting with the focus on that meeting's business rather than the last one.



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THANK YOU FOR READING