

How to Run a Meeting So Great People Can't Wait to Come Back

About one to two weeks BEFORE the meeting

Request that people who cannot come notify you, and provide you with reports comments, or the status of tasks they are responsible for. Call or go to see them if you have to.

Prepare an agenda and get it into member's hands at least a week before the meeting. State the title of the meeting: monthly, annual, emergency, budget, etc. **Always** inform the people you want at the meeting of the time, place, date, and day of the meeting, as well as how long it will last. Note next to each item whether it is for discussion, information, or to make a decision. Note who is responsible for reporting on or presenting the item. Indicate any invited speakers or special guests.

Be clear in your own mind, and make clear to others, what the purpose of the meeting is. It may be to conduct routine business, make decisions, generate ideas, transfer information, or even to have fun.

If the group agrees there's a need, call members the day before to remind them of the meeting.

The day of the meeting

Make copies of everything that needs to be handed out at the meeting, including all the items you mailed to the members. Many will forget to bring theirs.

Come early enough to set up the room, arrange handouts, and if possible, make coffee.

Hang your group's Ground Rules and Mission Statement on the wall or prop them on an easel.

Start on time. Make it a policy to start and end all meetings as close as possible to the scheduled time.

At the meeting

Always have members introduce themselves... call it "roll call" if you have to. You may be great with names but someone is sure to forget. For meetings where the same people are always present, make name cards and bring them to set at their place.

Circulate an attendance sheet so they can check off their name and correct or add any contact information. This keeps your mailing list up to date.

Review the agenda briefly and make any last minute revisions, additions, or other changes. If the agenda is ambitious, set clear time limits on each item.

Assign someone to take minutes, or if another person is the chair you may take them. The same person should not try to both run the meeting and take notes. Minutes should record decisions and major discussion items.

When a task is assigned, make sure specific dates are set for completion and each member knows what they are responsible for.

If discussion runs on and no progress is being made, the chair or timekeeper needs to call time out and table or re-schedule the item. For any meeting over an hour, a timekeeper is very useful.

At the close of the meeting, briefly recap the decisions made, tasks assigned, and other products of the meeting. Close the meeting briskly and on a positive note.

After the meeting, preferably the very next day

Prepare the minutes and any other reports. Send them out either immediately or with the next meeting announcement, as the group prefers. The date, time, and place of the next meeting should always be at the end of the minutes.

Follow up on any action items; update the action register.

In writing, thank those who made a special contribution to the meeting, especially if they are volunteers.

Set a tentative agenda for the next meeting, and not on your calendar when you need to complete it.

General comments:

Don't have a meeting just to meet. There needs to be real work to accomplish, that actually requires people to be physically present.

Don't expect people to review documents at a meeting. Send documents out well ahead, with specific requests for why they are to read it and what sort of comments you require. Ask for written comments in advance of the meeting.

Many committees are memorials to dead problems. Any long-standing committee should evaluate its existence once a year to see if there is a good reason to keep going.

That said, physical meetings are necessary to establish trust, let people get to know each other, develop a collective identity, and validate the decisions of the group. A meeting is the place where the group revises, updates, and refreshes what it knows *as a group*.

The collective mind of the group is capable of producing better ideas than each member singly. The original idea is tested, modified, refined, and shaped by argument and discussion until it satisfies more requirements and overcomes more objections than it could in its original form.

A meeting creates in all present a commitment to the decisions it makes and the objectives it pursues. (Consensus). Real opposition to decisions within organizations usually consists of one part disagreement and nine parts resentment at not being consulted before the decision.

The decisions reached at a meeting bear more weight than the decisions of a single person. It is harder to challenge a decision of the board than of an executive acting alone.

About Ground Rules

Developing ground rules early on gives the group a real advantage in conducting successful meetings. Some suggestions:

- Meetings will start and end on time, because everyone's time is valuable.
- Who the minute-taker and timekeeper will be, and if these tasks will rotate.
- How decisions will be made: by consensus, vote, etc. Keep in mind that voting creates winners and losers.
- Members agree to support the decisions as long as they can live with them, even if they do not like them.
- "Park your guns at the door". (State facts and needs, not positions and opinions).
- Keep the fish stories for the break... or the parking lot.

Facilitator Tips:

If nobody's talking, don't fill the silence. Wait the group out.

If the tension gets really thick, defuse the situation with gentle, non-judgmental humor.

Refer the group back to their mission and vision statements when they get stuck.

Phrase goals in a measurable way: **"To [increase, decrease] the _____ from [present condition] to [future condition] by [date]."**

Pin the group down to specifics..... what are we doing, when and where, who is responsible, how are we going to deliver the product. Record these decisions on the action plan.