



How to Hold Effective Meetings

Meetings are a requisite tool for coordinating groups and teams of people, be it a steering committee or a board of directors. If people do not effectively make use of each other's time then people feel poorly utilized and it is a waste of the our single greatest non-renewable resource: *time*.

An efficiently organized a meeting will have (P.A.T.):

- Purpose
- Agenda
- Timeline

If these elements are missing, then you have a recipe for frustration. If you would like to participate in an excellent meeting, then you should also have well defined:

- Process
- Roles



Purpose:

If you don't know why you are meeting, *then don't!* Take a step back and think about why you need to have the meeting; this will lead to a clear structure. Make sure that all participants understand and buy-in to the purpose of the meeting. Just a few of the common purposes are:

- communication of information
- sharing of best practices
- planning
- problem solving
- decision making
- strengthening relationships and building alignment

Remember: If people get bogged down in digressions, then maybe other side meetings need to occur or there could be a deeper root cause; e.g. lack of buy in, etc.

Agenda:

Consider this the *script*; it must be distributed beforehand. Without a script people will not realize why they are there and will feel lost and left out. The purpose will define the agenda. An agenda is a checklist that will include:

- topics
- presenter/facilitator
- time allotment

Remember: an agenda is meaningless if nobody follows it.

Timeline:

A clear timeline should:

- keep people on topic and offer direction
- provide participants a tool for planning
- allow participants a context to prepare for
- communicate when and what the group is doing

Remember: Always start and stop on time. Do not wait for latecomers and do not go over unless everybody agrees. Running over and waiting for others is not only authoritarian but it also

punishes people for being punctual and that is not a culture which should be introduced to a group dynamic.

If having a *purpose, agenda and timeline* still leaves your group wanting, then clearly define *process and roles*.

Process:

It often helps if people are provided parameters for how an agenda item is to be processed. An agenda could clearly state that the group is there to:

- brainstorm
- provide reports or updates
- come to a conclusion or decision
- discuss
- debate
- listen to guest presenter

By laying out what people are to expect, it enables meeting participants to know how they are to interact and provides them avenues to participate. With an ill-defined process meetings are more easily dominated by more confident members or dominated by digressions because participants simply don't understand why they are there.

Roles:

There ought to be a/an:

- scribe
- impartial timekeeper
- facilitator

Scribes:

This is a key role: *the scribe controls the flow of information*. The scribe records history for those who are not there. Meeting minutes will enable new or absent members to quickly be brought up to speed and serve as a reminder of what happened for those who were there. It is important that the recorder know what level of detail the group desires to have and has clear instructions on what is to be done with the information.

Impartial timekeeper:

This moderator watches the time and keeps the flow of the meeting moving. It is important that people understand that when the timekeeper says move on that it is not personal just their job.

Facilitator:

A facilitator is responsible for directing the process so the participants can focus on the content: *facilitation is not leading, but rather a tool of the group*. This is a crucial and demanding role; a skilled facilitator will:

- direct the flow of discussion and resolve roadblocks
- summarize points and keeping the discussion on track
- capture ideas and digressions
- keep the spirit productive

A facilitator is not a participator, it is important the group know when a facilitator is facilitating and when they have "taken off that hat" and "put on another hat" to speak their mind.



For more info:

www.effectivemeetings.com
<http://leadinginsight.com/meetings.htm>
www.ic.org/nica/Process/Effmeet.html