



Guidelines for Effective Team Meetings

Before holding a meeting, consider...

- Purpose – why are you holding a meeting?
- Audience – who should attend?
- Resources – what information or other resources do you need for the meeting?

Suggestions for the Meeting Leader

- No plan, no reason, no meeting. Don't meet just to be meeting.
- Start on time. Be prompt. Set the standard.
- Stick to your agenda.
- Recognize two basic types of meetings:
 - Meetings that generate ideas
 - Meetings that determine outcomes

Don't confuse the two. If you try to overload with agenda with too much to accomplish, your team members will be overwhelmed and little will be accomplished.
- “Eat the elephant one bite at a time.” Don't try to do everything at once. Break down issues into digestible chunks.
- Include those in the meeting who need to know. Don't waste other folks' time when they have no role in the outcome of the meeting.
- Don't allow hijackers to steal your meeting. Don't allow “rabbit chasing” – keep a tight reign on the agenda.
-

- Don't hog the spotlight. The meeting should be an exchange of ideas, not a forum for the leader to impose his/her personal agenda on others.
- Be supportive of each person present. Even the quietest person has a desire to be understood even if not heard.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- People support what they helped to create, so be inclusive in solving problems and generating ideas. Everyone has something they can contribute.
- The mind can only absorb what the butt can endure. Most folks have about a 21-minute attention span when it comes to discussing issues. Break your meeting up – shake it up to keep people interested and focused.
- Come prepared. Arrive on time. Participate. Stay focused. Help others stay focused. Listen.

Suggestions for the Meeting Leader

Begin with the three meeting starting points:

- Review the WDWBW (Who Does What By When) follow-up from the previous meeting. This builds in accountability and discipline for team members.
- Clarify the purpose of each topic with a “purpose check”:
 - At the end of this meeting, what must we have accomplished?
 - What results do we have to achieve?

The main objective for any topic will be to inform, discuss, or decide.

- Do an “agenda check” to ensure the completeness and order of the topics:

“Here's what is proposed on the agenda. Does anyone have something to add? Does anyone want to change the order?”

Always have an agenda for a meeting – and make sure everyone attending has it in advance of the meeting. Allow team members to have input on the agenda.

- Conduct the meeting effectively. Stay on time, involve members, and seek different opinions and points of view. Make appropriate decisions, “push back” when members

seem to be forcing their personal opinions or agenda on the group. Record commitments in the WDWBW follow-up.

- Occasionally debrief the meeting to determine how it's going. Make sure the flow of the meeting is working for the members.
- Before you close the meeting, ask, "With whom do we need to communicate?" Our actions and decisions can affect others, so we proactively need to structure in this step to ensure communication and cooperation.
- Finally, review assignments and commitments – the WDWBW follow-up.

Ideas for Jump-Starting a Stalled Meeting

- **Establish ground rules** covering interruptions, disrespectful behavior, and attempts to dominate the discussion—all of which can derail a meeting. Refer to these ground rules when one of them is broken and bring the discussion back on track.
- **Summarize and review** the issues and proposed solutions. This may elicit new suggestions and fresh ways of looking at the problems.
- **Restate the outcome** you're looking for in different words. The nuance of a new word or phrase may spark further exploration.
- **Suggest a solution.** Let the meeting participants examine a proposed action, even an off-the-wall idea. Kicking around a specific idea may help them develop a workable answer to the situation under discussion.
- **Brainstorm.** Suggest and record ideas, the more creative the better, without limiting yourself to narrow boundaries of what's acceptable. Let the meeting become freewheeling; build on other people's thoughts and concepts.
- **Take a break.** The time may have come for everyone to stretch his or her legs and recharge some mental batteries. You might request one or two people to gather specific information for discussion after the break.
- **Make a decision.** The person in charge may choose to simply make a unilateral decision about the situation you're discussing. This may prompt further discussion, or help participants realize that they've examined the issue all they can.

Eight Keys to an Awful Meeting

- The meeting leader must have a vague purpose.
-

- Participants must say nothing about the meeting's vague purpose (or the lack of purpose).
- The meeting leader must be sure there's enough irrelevant material that each person may be bored senseless for a significant amount of time.
- The participants must not mention that some of the meeting is a waste of their time.
- Participants must try to appear interested in continuing the meeting by bringing up pet subjects and making sure their special issues (those *not* on the agenda) get covered.
- When a leader or participant notices this happening, he or she must say nothing.
- No matter how disgusted everyone is, all must agree to hold critical comments until they leave the meeting, and then pass on their critical comments to people who can do nothing about the issues.
- When assignments or decisions are made, no one must record them or ever bring them up again.