

MEETING MANAGEMENT



“The purpose of a meeting is to bring depth and breadth of discussion to a problem that merits the attention and effort of every member present.”

– Alfred J. Marrow, Chairman, Harwood Manufacturing Company

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever sat through a meeting and wondered why you were there—certain people dominated the discussion, there were no clear objectives, the meeting started late and there was no end in sight? Virtually everyone has experienced meeting mismanagement. And with a few simple tools you can make your meetings effective and productive. A successful meeting is the result of much more

than an agenda and refreshments. As with any initiative, its success depends on your preparation, execution, and follow-up. The following guidelines will help you make the most of your meetings. Here’s what you need to do:

- Define the purpose
- Select and prepare the participants
- Establish and enforce a protocol
- Follow-up

DEFINE THE PURPOSE

If you’re thinking about holding a meeting, the first thing you want to do is define the purpose. The reasons for holding meetings vary widely. You might hold meetings to brainstorm, share information, deliver progress reports, train, do team building, or even a combination of the above. Once you’ve defined a clear purpose, see if there are alternative ways of accomplishing your purpose without holding

a meeting. Technology provides us with many options that can help us use our time more efficiently. If a conference call or group email will achieve the purpose, then do that instead.

WEEKLY MEETINGS

The average executive spends 17 hours each week in meetings.

Also keep in mind that there is an opportunity cost to every meeting. If your people were not in a meeting would they be completing a task, managing their teams or servicing customers? Is there a loss in revenue or productivity while they are away? There are times when the opportunity costs exceed the value of a meeting. And, sometimes there is no substitute for sitting down together. Exploring other options first will help you make sure that you are using your resources, and your people's resources wisely.

COST OF MEETINGS PER HOUR

Annual Salaries	With 10 Participants
\$125K	\$780
\$90	\$560
\$50K	\$310

SELECT THE PARTICIPANTS

All participants attending a meeting should support and relate to your purpose. However, not everyone who attends the same meeting needs to have the same role. For example, you may invite a supervisor from another department to a progress report meeting so she can get ideas on how to run her department more effectively. The



supervisor is gathering information while the other participants are giving progress reports. The social benefits of meetings are important as well. You may include a member of your team in certain meetings to recognize them for a job well done or to help increase their scope of responsibility. Participants should know what's expected of them before they get to the meeting. Those asked to make presentations should have ample direction and preparation time so they can use their time, and your time effectively.

ESTABLISH & ENFORCE A PROTOCOL

Establish a meeting protocol before you begin. Enforce it religiously during the meeting. Your protocol should include the following:

1. Start on time and end on time—even if you need to reschedule for later in the week to finish agenda items. As you build credibility, people will be more willing to work with you because they'll feel that you respect their time.
2. Prepare an agenda that lists the topics, presenters, and the time allotted for each topic.

3. Take minutes and deliver them to all participants and interested parties within two or three days after the meeting. Assign someone to record:

- Meeting date and participants' names
- Brief summaries of each topic
- Decisions made
- People assigned to specific tasks
- Dates for completion

4. Clearly communicate the level and type of participation you expect during the meeting. For example, if you plan to brainstorm, state that everyone should speak freely and no judgment is to be made on any idea until the end. If someone makes a judgment statement, simply say, "let's save judgment until we are done brainstorming" and move on.

5. Save tangential items for the end of the meeting. Include a time for them on the agenda and encourage people to write down their ideas during the meeting so they remember their questions or comments.



MANAGING CONFLICT

If you're doing a good job of encouraging open and honest communication, you are bound to experience some conflict between participants. This can be a good thing for your team's productivity if you manage the conflict well. Here's how you do it:

1. *Publicly recognize the conflict.* "It seems we have a disagreement on this matter."
2. *Clarify the differences by asking direct questions.* "Why do you think that this proposal is unrealistic?"
3. *Help each side see the other's viewpoint.* Restate each side's position and ask them to verify that your summary is an accurate representation of their viewpoint.
4. *If you need further information, gather information and come back to the problem in a later meeting.* "We cannot resolve this problem until we have more information. Let's get together on Wednesday to discuss this issue further."
5. *Ask the team to work on a resolution.* Encourage people who are not as invested or closely related to the problem, but part of your team to engage in creative problem solving work. An outside perspective can sometimes provide the necessary perspective to find a compromise or solution to a problem.

FOLLOW-UP

Sufficient and timely follow-up will help you execute on decisions made in your meetings. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Deliver a copy of the meeting's minutes to each participant within a few days. This will serve as an action plan and reinforcement tool.
- Review relevant items from the last meeting during your next meeting. Reinforce decisions and key learnings.

TO DO LIST

- ✓ Determine the purpose. Make sure a meeting is your best option for the given purpose.
- ✓ Create an agenda. List topics, presenters and time allotments.
- ✓ Invite participants ahead of time and define their roles and level of participation.
- ✓ Lay ground rules or protocol. State them up front so people know what to expect.
- ✓ Enforce protocol. Build trust and credibility.
- ✓ Keep minutes and distribute them within a few days following the meeting. Reinforce the decision-making process and follow through.

TOP TEN BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

1. Focus on minutiae rather than priorities
2. Restricted communications
3. Lack of purpose or agenda
4. Decision of a few forced on all
5. Lack of attendance or interest
6. Personal agendas are advanced
7. Not enough time or resources allotted
8. Dysfunctional team norms
9. Competition or conflict
10. Domination by the leader

- Arlene Sirkin, Successful Team-building

THE BOTTOM LINE

You spend an inordinate amount of time in meetings. Make your meetings productive by having clear objectives, planning effectively, and following through on meeting outcomes.

"One cool judgment is worth a thousand hasty councils. The thing to do is to supply light and not heat."

- Woodrow Wilson

