

Making More of Meetings

You've just been invited to yet another meeting! Are you ecstatic? Or, do you hope to call in sick that day? Most of us feel we spend too much of our work life, preparing for, attending, and following up on meetings. But meetings do not need to be a waste of time. When well organized and conducted, meetings can help us build relationships at work and achieve significant business results. Here are some tips on transforming your meetings into effective ways to achieve business success.

So what are effective meetings?

Meetings can be different in content and organization but all effective meetings have one common characteristic, they require planning. Here are some tips to well-planned, effective meetings:

Before the meeting:

- Create an agenda. A good agenda outlines the items for discussion and allots time for each item.
- Circulate the agenda prior to the meeting. This allows meeting participants to be prepared and therefore able to provide more well thought out input during the meeting.
- List the most important topics first in the agenda. This will help ensure that higher priority items get addressed.
- Agree to decision making methods. For example, are you going to vote on an issue, come to consensus or let the leader decide? Knowing what your decision-making method is before the meeting, saves you time and establishes transparency.

During the meeting:

- Start meetings on time. This shows that you value other people's time and expect the same from other meeting participants.
- Set ground rules or operating norms for the meeting. Sample ground rules include:
 - We will allow ourselves to be facilitated
 - We will listen and check for understanding
 - We will be honest, open and constructive in our contribution
 - We will draw on each other's strengths and experience to make the meeting more productive
 - We will respect each other. For example, not interrupt when others are speaking
- Assign a meeting facilitator to ensure discussions stay on track.
- Assign a note-taker.
- Assign a timekeeper to ensure that all the discussion items are covered in a timely manner.
- Enhance participation by asking people for their contribution, one person at a time, allowing sufficient time for people to think through their thoughts.

After the meeting:

- Thank people for their time.
- Share meeting minutes and follow-up on items that were categorized thus.
- Generate a meeting evaluation to solicit feedback on what worked well and what could be improved.
- Follow through on changes to be adopted at the next meeting.

Still facing challenges?

- Are your meetings often plagued with off-topic but useful comments? Create a “parking lot” where ideas can be kept for future discussion.
- Are you left to deal with disruptive participants? Find a way to engage them; assign them note-taking or time-keeping roles to help keep distractions at bay.
- Trying to make virtual meetings across the globe work? Recognize and make accommodations for differing time zones when scheduling meetings and ask participants to use the mute button on their phones. When applicable, ask everyone on the call to introduce themselves, in order, to ensure participation and interaction. Additionally, asking participants to speak slowly, check for understanding and avoid jargon will help your global meetings succeed.

Sample Agenda:

AGENDA			
Meeting Attendees:			
Date:			
Time:			
Purpose:			
Desired Outcomes:			
Agenda Topics			
What	How	Who	Time
(Content)	(Process)	(Which Person)	(Minutes)
Set up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles • Desired outcomes • Ground rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present items • Clarify for understanding • Check for agreement 	Facilitator	
Wrap up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next steps 	Discussion	Group	

How many meetings is too many?

Some people argue that we should have more, rather than fewer meetings – just more of the “right kind.” In the book Death by Meetings, author Patrick Lencioni suggests that we should have four types of meetings: a daily standing (literally) to check in, a weekly tactical where metrics, issues and obstacles are addressed, a monthly strategic meetings to examine issues affecting long term success and a quarterly offsite meeting review strategy. To learn more about what Lencioni has to say, [click here](#).

Still need help with making your meetings a success? Contact Pro Way Development at info@prowaydevelopment.com to learn about more focused strategies for effective meetings and explore some of the other great training programs that we have on offer!