



Making Meetings Count

For a majority of America's workforce, the weekend offers a much needed opportunity for relaxation and rejuvenation. Quite often during the course of a weekend, we find ourselves wrapped up in conversation for hours on end with someone near and dear. Generally, the conversation will meander through a variety of topics from current events to more abstract discussions including what you plan to do when, not if, you win the lottery. Now, imagine the weekend is over and you are sitting in your Monday morning staff meeting struggling to keep your eyes open.

Sound familiar? Well, think about this. Does your meeting format bear some striking similarities to the conversation you had over the weekend? If you are unclear about the purpose of the meeting or find yourself and your colleagues failing to make any decisions, you might just be passing time again. Without a doubt, that is not the intended purpose of any meeting.

To Have a Meeting or Not to Have a Meeting? Today, it seems as though the resolution to each and every business issue begins with a meeting. While some meetings simply can not be avoided, others can – and should. Before you organize a potentially unnecessary meeting, consider some other ways to accomplish your objectives. If it is advice you seek or you have a need to disseminate information, many tools are at your fingertips including a simple email, phone call, or impromptu hallway conversation. So, when is it appropriate to conduct a meeting?

- To inform workers about changes that will impact them directly.
- To build consensus – the success of a project may depend on it.
- To assemble the information required to make a sound decision.
- To brainstorm. The synergy of the team may yield results greater than those provided by each individual.
- To deal with highly complex topics.
- To provide a forum for conflict resolution.

Okay, so you think having a meeting is the right course of action. What can you do to conduct an effective meeting in addition to having a well-defined purpose? You must plan for the meeting, assign action items during the meeting and make provisions for assessment afterwards.

Planning – The Benefits of an Agenda. To have an effective meeting, there needs to be a clear understanding of the objectives to be accomplished. Following that, there must be a determination of who needs to be in attendance. Other logistical arrangements such as time and place may follow at this time along with the designation of someone to take minutes. It is very important to document who was there and exactly what decisions were made. What else? An agenda.

An agenda is always a good idea to keep focused on the task at hand. An agenda typically includes such items as a review of notes from previous meetings, a discussion of new issues and an evaluation of progress toward goal achievement. To build an effective agenda, it may be a good idea to seek topic ideas from team members. If participants know that their topic of concern will be addressed, they are less likely to interrupt! On the other hand, if the topic does not fit into the overall purpose of the meeting, it should not be included. Finally, the agenda should be distributed well in advance of the meeting. This allows participants to prepare, thereby making the meeting far more productive.

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Making Meetings Count (cont.)

Conducting the Meeting. Many meetings fail because no one person is facilitating the meeting or because someone is dominating the meeting. Acting as a facilitator, you may want to establish and enforce some ground rules at the onset to enhance productivity. The starting time and planned duration needs to be decided on and adhered to. In addition, participants should be prepared and, at all times, mutual respect should come into play. Finally, as facilitator, it is your job to keep the discussion on course. Sticking to your agenda is a good way to do this. And remember, as a general rule, new issues that arise during the course of a meeting are best handled in another meeting or off-line.

Assigning Action Items. All right, your meeting is going well and decisions are being made. If no plans are being made to implement those decisions, however, the train is leaving the tracks. To resolve this, specific action items need to be assigned along with dates for completion and plans for assessment and reporting by the appropriate parties.

Meetings can be a positive communication tool! Planning allows for more accomplishments in less time. By working to improve your meeting skills, your whole team benefits.

Want to improve your efficiencies in other places as well? As performance management consultants, we can help you maximize productivity in many areas of your company. Give us a call today.