
DYNAMIC LEADER

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MEETINGS THAT WORK

Steps to Effective Meetings

One of the biggest timewasters within organizations is meetings. And yet they are seen to be an important part of every business. Poorly planned, badly handled meetings cost hours of time that could be used more effectively. Some of the main complaints in most organizations is “poorly planned”, “to long”, “badly run”, late attendance, no agenda, no prioritization of items, poor chairmanship, etc. Below, I will touch on the essential skills on when to conduct and how to conduct effective meetings.

Step 1 – Purpose

Have a reason for the meeting. Make sure there are decisions, issues, or such items to be discussed that cannot be handled effectively outside of the meeting. Avoid the temptation to have a meeting just because it is Tuesday morning and we always have a meeting on Tuesday morning. Meetings are an essential aspect of conducting business in today's work environment, so much so that unnecessary meetings cannot be allowed to foster cynicism toward legitimate meetings. Keep in mind, there are no neutral meetings, the meeting is either beneficial to the group or detrimental.

Take Control of Your Workday *One or Two Day Workshop*

Some of what you will learn:

- Understanding controllable vs. uncontrollable time
- How to stay on course throughout the day
- Create a daily plan that ensures results
- The 4 sources of a to-do-list: Your boss, your customers, your subordinates and yourself
- Determining priorities
- Cut down on unnecessary interruptions
- Dealing with people who don't respect your time
- Reduce telephone interruptions

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Step 2 – Prepare

Build the knowledge base prior to the meeting. If there is new information to be provided to attendees, e-mail or mail this information prior to the meeting. By doing so, valuable meeting time is not spent skimming the handout materials. Attendees must then be expected to come prepared, having read what was sent out in advance. The meeting leader and/or the person's direct supervisor must follow up with those that do not come prepared to participate. Management teams that institute this practice are able to cut their meeting time in half.

Step 3 – Roadmap

Have a meeting agenda: “If you don't know where you are going, you might end up some place else.” Comparatively, a meeting without an agenda will not offer attendees clear objectives. A strong agenda will set the tone on what will be achieved. Having an agenda is not enough; it only helps if you actually follow it. Remember, the items on the agenda are so important that you called a meeting in the first place. If you allow new issues to become the focus, then you are taking away from the agenda items. Also, limit the amount of items on the agenda to a reasonable amount; you do not want so many items that following the next step is impossible.

Step 4 - Time Management

Start and end on time. Start on time and do not take time out of the meeting to help late arrivals catch up. This will reinforce people to show up on time. A specific ending time will support a timely closure to agenda items. Some meetings will get slowed down by a few well-intended contributors going on and on about irrelevant items. (Each group has someone like this – if your meetings do not, it's probably you!) Even relevant items can be discussed in circles so many times that the group gets dizzy. Time limits allow the meeting leader to focus the group on accomplishing the agenda timely. Referring to the agenda as the reason to move on allows the facilitator to avoid hurt feelings. Meeting attendees appreciate your demonstration of respect for their time.

Step 5 - Rules of Engagement

Develop meeting norms (guidelines) and follow them. Meeting norms help a group work together in an agreed upon manner. These norms are intended to facilitate a healthier interaction and limit wasted time and effort. The specific meeting norms depend on the group of people attending. A common norm is to allow everyone an uninterrupted opportunity to contribute. Once norms are established, it is imperative that everyone follows them. Many groups have been proactive about establishing norms. Unfortunately, too many of these groups fail to hold everyone accountable to the norms. This can be more damaging than no norms at all. The meeting leader must respectfully remind participants of the norms when they start to stray.

Step 6 - Discuss & Decide

Encourage participation and make decisions. It is a waste of time and resources to have people in a meeting, which does not contribute to the productivity of the company. Even if you must post-pone a decision until more data is available, make that determination and move forward. When making group decisions, explicitly invite everyone to participate. If you notice someone not participating, ask directly for his or her view on the subject. Complete participation allows for a more informed decision and also limits the post-decision critics' ability to say they knew it wasn't going to work. Warning: some critics will still complain and place blame even if it was their idea.

Step 7 - Action

Follow up on tasks assigned during the meeting. A meeting can appear very productive at the closing and never actually accomplish anything beyond discussion. A great way to handle this follow-through issue is to close the meeting by reviewing what was discussed and creating a task list with responsible people and timelines. Included on this list should be the task of following up with people who were unable to attend the meeting and informing them on important information missed. Another important aspect of follow up is the list (often called a Parking Lot) of items that were brought up and determined to be better handled at another time. I have attended too many meetings where the Parking Lot would have been better titled the Black Hole – because we never saw those items again. The best decisions in the world do not accomplish much if they are not implemented.

This list contains a solid foundation towards making your meetings effective. Now, it is your personal responsibility to take this information and use it. Do it for your organization, your team, and yourself.

PRESIDENT'S PIECE

Plan The Year With Positive Expectancy



This year can be the year of your dreams, the year of great accomplishments, the year you realize and utilize your potential, the year you receive recognition, the year you achieve long-sought goals in your spiritual, intellectual, social, financial, physical and family life.

This year will be exciting and rewarding only if you make it so. This year will hold accomplishments and achievements only if you expect it to happen.

Positive expectancy is the attitude you must adopt and maintain. The level of your accomplishments will depend upon your understanding and application of the principles of positive expectancy, you must expect positive things to happen.

If you want to live with positive expectancy, you must imagine great accomplishments. You must ardently desire that this year will be the best year of your life. I challenge you to plan and live with thoughts and dreams filled with enthusiasm and positive expectancy.