

MAKING MEETINGS EFFECTIVE

Though very little of it is complimentary, much has been said about all of the meetings that are usually run. Committees meet, groups meet, and meet some more. There is little chance that we will change this and we really don't want to. Meetings are a way of life and to a large extent, the necessary thread of life in most volunteer organizations. The reason we sometimes make fun of them or complain about them is that they take up a lot of our time.

If, however, you have experienced the satisfaction of attending and being a part of a well-run meeting – one that accomplished specific goals, did it quickly and efficiently, then your feelings are probably very positive. During this program, we will look at things that form the basis of effective meetings.

WHY MEETINGS CAUSE US PROBLEMS AND TEND TO BE TIME WASTERS:

1. They seem destined to drone painfully on to dismal results.
2. The leader loses control.
3. Some participants constantly cover the same old ground.
4. No one comes prepared.
5. People arrive late.
6. There is no stated goal or result toward which to move – everyone defends their own point of view.
7. They get side-tracked.
8. We try to cover too many topics.
9. There are hidden agendas.

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WHY DO WE HOLD MEETINGS?

1. Meetings define the team.
2. The group revises, updates, and adds to what it knows as a group.
3. It helps the individual understand the collective aim of the group and the way in which his/her own work can contribute to the group's success.
4. A meeting can create in all those present a commitment to the decisions it makes and the objectives it pursues.
5. In the world of community organizations a meeting is often the only occasion where the team exists and works as a group, and the only time when the chair is actually perceived as the leader of the team.
6. A meeting is a status arena.
7. Group problem-solving has advantages.

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MAKING MEETINGS MORE PRODUCTIVE.

The three dimensions of a meeting:

1. Processes of meeting management:

Goals

Priorities

Time frames

Task assignments

Evaluation

2. Processes of human interaction at meetings:

Ability to talk straight

Ability to manage “air time”

Ability to track the group process

Ability to use “feeling” data

Ability to manage conflict

Skill at closure

3. The physical setting:

Location

Time

Size of the group

Type of meetings

Duration

Responsibilities of the leader:

Before the meeting

4.

During the meeting

After the meeting

TIPS FOR MEETING LEADERS

In order to make meetings productive, the leader and participants should follow a systematic series of procedures which will insure they enter the meeting well prepared. Once in the meeting, each person has an obligation to devote his or her energies to accomplishing the stated purpose of the meeting.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

1. Know the precise purpose of the meeting and what should be accomplished by adjournment time. What are the desired outcomes? State them as "Agenda Items".
2. Know and understand the participants. If participants are not known to each other have each print his or her name boldly on large cards that can be folded and placed in front of each person.
3. Prepare an agenda and be sure that everyone receives a copy before the meeting starts. Indicate topics to be covered and the approximate time to be spent on each topic.
4. Prepare an outline for your own use in leading the discussion, showing more detailed breakdown of subjects, questions and other specific methods you will use in guiding the group.
5. Prepare opening remarks. These should be well thought out, but they should be informal and not read from a manuscript.
6. Be sure that all necessary facilities and materials to be used are available and in order.
7. Select a recorder and coordinate with him or her as to the nature of the proceedings.
8. Be prepared to vary and amend your schedule if necessary.

DURING THE MEETING

1. Accomplish the purpose of the meeting. This is the basic responsibility, and the leader must constantly be aware of whether the group is reaching its objective.
2. Start discussion and keep it organized. Stimulating discussion among group members and keeping it systematic requires constant attention and active listening.
3. Guide and control the discussion. The leader must ensure that every participant has a chance to speak, that the outline is being followed, and that the time is being observed.

Leader's Tools and Methods

1. Opening remarks: These should be conversational, establishing common ground and indicating group interest. They should be brief. Notes may be used, but this should not be a formal speech. The topic or problem should be stated clearly, making a definite transition to the first point on the agenda. Start with a general question, being ready to follow up with a more specific question if necessary.
2. Organized sequence: If the discussion follows a clear, well-organized sequence, the group will be more inclined to participate and talk freely.
3. Transitions and summaries: The leader should make clear when the discussion turns from one point to another. He or she should summarize as the discussion progresses so that everyone knows where the group stands.
4. Action: Identify action items and assign those who are responsible for them. Establish the time frame for completing these items.

Tips for Handling Participants

1. Talkative: They are not necessarily a handicap. They initiate discussion and stimulate others. If one talks too much, try to recognize others. If known before the meeting starts to be an issue, perhaps seat them in a “blind” spot to the right or left up front.
2. Expert: If a member of the group is known to be expert in a particular phase of the subject he should be drawn on when appropriate.
3. Silent: Some members don't like to contribute initially but will be good participants after they get started. Try to draw out on a point they will respond to, but be cautious if you are not sure they will reply. Ask that participant something that will indicate respect for their authority.
4. Logical: The systematic thinker can be used for summaries and help in keeping the discussion organized.
5. Argumentative: Some exchange of opinion is wanted. If it gets too heated, the leader must step in and resolve with humor, tact, or by diverting the discussion to another point.

AFTER THE MEETING:

1. Send out the list of “Action Items” within a week after the meeting. Offer assistance, but encourage adherence to the time frame.
2. Review the minutes of the meeting and distribute them (along with the list of “Action Items”) about a week prior to the next meeting.
3. Seek input from participants as to how to make future meetings more productive.