



Productive Business Meetings

By: Kelly Graves “The Corporate Therapist™”

Meetings are, without a doubt, the single largest misuse of time, money and resources that people in organizational life must endure. Yet, leaders and managers across the globe keep doing the same thing every week, such as: End meetings with unspecific goals, vague timelines, little to no accountability, no agenda, no pre-meeting preparation, participants have different interpretations of what was said and agreed to, participants rarely contribute their honest ideas and feelings, no one knows who is going to do what and by when, participants don't feel heard, and as a result don't get involved and “tune-out.” Here are some suggestions on how to improve meeting efficiency and effectiveness:

Meeting Planning Criteria

Plan meetings using these criteria: For a meeting or project to end successfully, it must begin successfully and a few minutes of planning will pay huge dividends in the long run.

1. What is the purpose of the meeting?
2. What are the desired outcomes? Be specific and goal oriented.
3. Is a meeting necessary to achieve the objectives and outcomes?
4. Who NEEDS to attend? Would their time be better used elsewhere and an email sent after the fact outlining the major points?
5. Create an agenda and send out to the participants 24 to 72 hours prior to the meeting. The more cognitive or introverted the participants, the more lead-time you must give them. Detail oriented people need time to digest the information and mentally work through processes and possible decisions. Extroverts or people-oriented types, on the other hand, are usually OK with agendas that are handed out minutes before the meeting.
6. Pre-meeting assignments are tasks completed by participants in advance such as: read documents and be ready to discuss, fully understand documents and be prepared to make a decision at 10:15, provide a 12 minute presentation regarding company X merger options.
7. What unexpected issues might arise and how might you handle them?

Meeting Facilitation Strategies

The ability to lead and choreograph a group of people so that meetings are timely, effective, and results oriented are skills that can be learned with correct instruction, practice and persistence.

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Set ground rules to create a team contract of how people will behave. This will create safety and keep the meeting focused.

1. Start on time/Stop on time.
2. Invite everyone to participate. Use the “Check-in” method and acknowledge body and facial language.
3. Challenge ideas instead of people.
4. Respect confidentiality.
5. Determine time requirements of each topic and stick to it.
6. Have one person take notes and use a flip chart. Tape each page of the flip chart to the wall. This method will free up people to listen, update late-comers, and will make end of meeting overviews a snap.

Closure Activities

Seek closure by summarizing and generating conclusions and action items throughout the meeting. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and accountabilities are clear.

1. What decisions have been made?
2. Who is responsible for what action and by when?
3. Who may need assistance to complete their objectives?
4. What are agenda items for next time?
5. What issues remain open?
6. What made this meeting effective or ineffective?

Effective meetings can significantly improve the functioning of your organization, help people to learn how to communicate clearer, mend relationships and improve trust, align individual, department, and organization objectives, reduce labor costs and create precise accountabilities and timelines for increased productivity. Plus, they are simply more fun and will reduce brain damage for those who roll their eyes at one another other every Thursday morning at the weekly free-for-all.

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