

USE MEETINGS EFFECTIVELY

Meetings are one of many tools to accomplish organizational objectives. They can be a wonderful forum to create knowledge and insight, to address issues effectively with various perspectives considered, to create and deepen relationships. They can also be boring and incredible time wasters.

Practice: Ask yourself these simple questions when you are planning a meeting:

Deciding to have a meeting:

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- Is a meeting the most effective way to address the purpose?
- What participants are needed to achieve the meeting objective?

Preparing for the meeting:

- Are there things that can be done in advance of the meeting to make the time together of most value?
 - Are all participants fully prepared for the meeting?
 - Has the purpose of the meeting been clearly communicated?
 - Has information been sent out in advance?
 - Agenda with clear statement of the expectation or purpose of each agenda item noted (e.g. decision, information, gather input, etc.)
 - Background information on agenda items
 - Information that is simply for progress updates (so that meeting time is not used for this)
- Do people confirm their plans to attend in advance of the meeting?

Holding the Meeting:

- Do we start our meetings on time?
- Do we stick to the agenda?
- Do we allow for unstructured discussion at the end?
- How do we handle late comers and what does that say about what we value?
- If commitments are made at the meeting does an individual participant accept responsibility to follow through and within an agreed timeframe?

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Evaluating the Meeting: Do we assess how effective our meeting was?

- Reserve 5-10 minutes at the end of a meeting to assess its effectiveness and value asking the participants relevant questions such as:
- What did we do that allowed us to:
 - Be most productive?
 - Strengthen relationships within the group?
- What did we do that bogged us down?
- On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being high, was the time we spent of value to our purpose?
- What do we want to do differently next time?

Consider keeping one day as “meeting free” within your organization to enable everyone an opportunity for at least one work day focused completely on their individual priorities.