



Tips for Successful Meetings

All meetings are expensive! Poor ones cost even more in time, money, lost productivity and diminished morale. This guide is developed to help make your next meeting your best one.

Plan the reason for meeting and delegate individual preparation. All team members should know the specific goals of that meeting and how they need to individually prepare for it. The goal or objective should be restated at the beginning of every meeting.

Establish a "team culture" of individual preparedness. Nothing renders a meeting useless faster than lack of members' preparation. Therefore, team members must come to meetings prepared to accomplish that meeting's goals; e.g., completing assigned readings, brainstorming options, etc.

Identify a clear beginning and end time. Waiting around for tardy members can be extremely frustrating for busy people, so teams should establish a policy of punctuality to make the most out of their meeting time. Meetings should end on time unless an extension is agreeable to all participants.

Outline a clear agenda and "stick to it." Using an agenda makes it possible for all members to see what has been and what needs to be accomplished. Stick to the agenda unless there is solid justification for digression (new information, unforeseen issues). Monitor progress against the agenda.

Resolve each agenda item before moving to the next. If an agenda is realistic, members will feel accomplished as each item is addressed and resolved. Even if members are unable completely to resolve an agenda item, the team should make a decision about the item (gather more information and discuss it at next meeting, make changes, etc. or put it in a "parking lot").

Use wall charts or similar approaches for decision making and problem solving as a "group memory" to keep everyone in touch with the chart. Post chart pages.

As is typical of human nature, it is common for team members to take on informal roles (e.g., leader, peacekeeper) when in a meeting. It is often useful to play off this natural process by formalizing member roles for each meeting. People develop different points of view of the meeting process and use different skills depending on their roles in the meeting. Get the opinions of all team members.

Important roles in a meeting include:

- **Chair:** Keeps the discussion moving in the proper direction, introduces agenda items and facilitates discussion, ensures that everyone in the meeting has a chance to speak.
- **Time Keeper:** Sets time limits for agenda items
- **Devil's Advocate:** Brings up alternative points of view so that the group doesn't fall into a "groupthink" mentality and come to consensus too soon
- **Mediator:** Diplomatically mediates conflicts and differences of opinion

Evaluate meeting effectiveness, get feedback. Don't be afraid to ask, "Why are we having this meeting?"