

Tips for chairing effective meetings

Effectively run meetings enable managers to accomplish more in a shorter amount of time, with the added benefit of group involvement and buy-in.

Meetings can be time-consuming if they lack focus, the right members, or effective facilitation tools.

On the other hand, they can also be an extremely efficient way to get things done quickly, to support building a team environment, and to enable collaboration among key people to produce a better outcome than possible working independently.

Following are a few key steps to successful meeting facilitation.

1. Meet with a purpose

If you ask most people, they have been to one too many meetings that seemed (whether or not accurately so) to have no purpose. Be sure to call a meeting only if you have a clear reason for doing so. It doesn't matter what your reason might be.

- If you need information from the group, set a clear agenda with key questions ahead of time.
- If you want to share information, draft an outline of your key points.
- If you just want to get the team together to allow for engagement, organise it so that an interactive environment is encouraged

2. Communicate your purpose/agenda

So, you know why you're meeting—great!

- Now, tell everyone else why you are! Be sure to let all attendees know how long the meeting will be, where it will be, and what information is to be covered.
- Be sure to let them also know what the goal of the meeting is—what deliverables, outcomes, etc. are expected so they can come prepared.
- Just because you've called the meeting doesn't mean you're the only one who has to do the talking.
- Enable people to participate—sharing relevant information ahead of time, will ensure they come prepared to contribute, and take the spotlight off of you at the same time!

3. Supporting materials

- Come prepared with the appropriate supporting materials.
- If this is an information gathering session for example, bring forms or tools for completion.
- Whatever will support communication of your key points, gathering of the required information, or structuring of the discussion should be included to create a stronger sense that everyone's time is being well spent.

4. Everyone present for a purpose

Please ensure that every single individual invited to the meeting is there for a reason. More importantly ensure that each attendee clearly understands his/her specific role.

When planning your meeting consider team members' roles.

- How can they contribute?
- Do they have key information, skills, experience that you can leverage in the meeting?

Help them feel useful by letting them know the important role you'd like them to play.

Also helpful in running effective meetings, is to assign meeting management roles before you begin the meetings. Some specific meeting facilitation roles might include:

- Scribe: to record key information, and meeting minutes
- Whiteboard recorder: to capture key points, questions visually on the whiteboard
- Timekeeper: to help keep to the agenda
- "Devil's advocate": should the group tend to always passively agree to all suggestions, it might be helpful (and fun) to assign someone to play devil's advocate purely for the purpose of creating creative debate and discussion.

5. Outcomes/agreements captured and reviewed

Before you end the meeting, review the agreed action items, along with the responsible parties for each item as discussed during the meeting.

If you've assigned meeting scribes or flipchart recorders, then this step should be relatively simple.

6. Next steps defined

- Discuss timeframes for completion of action items, and also make sure to review next steps.
- Set expectations now for a follow-up meeting, should one be required.
- Let everyone know what you anticipate will need to be covered in the next meeting.

7. Show your appreciation

- Every single person's time is precious. So, be sure to thank them for their participation and contributions.
- Motivate key participants by letting them know after the meeting just how helpful their contributions were during the meeting.
- This will help to ensure that next time you need to have a meeting you'll find willing participants ready to go.

8. Reflect on your process

- Identify what went well, and what didn't.
- Learn from your experience and find ways to improve as you move forward.