

Effective Meetings

LAST UPDATED

JULY 14, 2003

There is a rather frightening statistic that says we will spend 9,000 hours of our lives in meetings. Wow! That is an awful lot of time, so it's important that it's not wasted. There are ways to make sure that a meeting is successful, well organized and worth the time of everyone involved.

First - **make sure you have a reason to have a meeting.** If you have scheduled weekly meetings, but there is nothing to discuss one week, don't feel obliged to hold the meeting anyway. Get in touch with your group members and tell them there won't be a meeting that week. The group will be grateful that they didn't sit around for an hour wasting time when there was no point to holding a meeting.

Second - **create an agenda.** Agendas give meetings an order, keep them moving and let people know what's going on. If possible, get the meeting attendees the agenda a couple days before the meeting so they can look it over and come prepared and ready to discuss the issues. You might want to add some graphics, a cartoon, or a saying to the agenda so that it sparks people's interest and keeps them in a good mood. Also, if you are a small enough group, you might want to begin the meeting with everyone checking in - maybe talking about the last movie they saw, or how their week is going. This will bring the participants a little closer, and relax the atmosphere. Sometimes this can be seen as a time waster if it goes on too long, so be careful what you use for a check-in.

Third - time is critical, so **start and end on time.** If you keep tangent discussions to a minimum, this shouldn't be difficult. It is your job to make sure everyone stays focused. You might want to assign someone as a time keeper to let you know when it's getting close to the scheduled ending time.

Fourth - **keep accurate minutes and records** of who takes responsibility for dealing with any action items that come up. Minutes should be given out within a few days of the meeting and should include accurate information on your members' individual responsibilities. Make sure that those who couldn't attend the meeting get copies of the minutes as soon as possible.

Fifth - **end the meeting well.** Summarize what has been said and end on a positive note by acknowledging the work of everyone at the meeting. Set a time and place for the next meeting at the end of your meeting. Let those who weren't able to attend know when it will be as soon as possible so they can mark their schedules. Try to vary the meeting place, if possible, in order to accommodate different members.

It's important that you encourage discussion and feedback from all the members throughout the meeting. Often one or two viewpoints dominate, so as the facilitator it's important that you ask for opinions from everyone, even those who are usually silent. Also, solicit feedback from your group members on what they would like to see in the meetings and on what they like and don't like about the current meeting structure. It's important that you don't lose touch with everyone else's opinions.

As a leader, it is also your role to encourage future leadership. One way to do this is to offer other group members a chance to facilitate a meeting. Rotating facilitators reduces the feeling that one person is in charge and has sole decision making power. Do all you can to get others involved!

Remember—people support what they help create!!