

**Tool Kit Topics:**

- Plan your meetings to increase effectiveness
- Solutions to several common meeting problems
- Handling communication issues during meetings
- Why meetings should be evaluated from time to time

## The High Cost of Holding Meetings

Meetings are a fact of business life. We seem to be either attending one or conducting one every time we turn around. They are also the most expensive means of communication available, costing much more in time and resources than writing an email, making a phone call or sending a FAX.

So when we proceed to utilize this pricey communication vehicle, it is important that we hold not just *any* meeting but we take the

time to make it an *effective* one.

***When is a meeting effective?***

A meeting is effective when it achieves its objectives in a minimum amount of time to the satisfaction of all the participants. This requires polishing up your meeting skills.



All meetings require some pre-planning. The leader has to determine why the meeting is necessary, who needs to come, what will be discussed, where to hold it and when. An agenda needs to be created and followed. These actions will help hold down costs and ensure that your meetings are both effective and efficient.

This toolkit contains information that will aid you in planning and conducting your next meeting.

### Startling Statistics On Meetings Today

- **11 million** meetings occur in the U.S. daily.
- The average professional attends **61 meetings per month or 9000 hours in a lifetime.**
- Research indicates that over **50% of this meeting time is wasted.**
- **91% of attendees admit to daydreaming** during meetings and **39% admit to dozing** during meetings.

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## Solutions To Common Meeting Problems

**When deciding on a meeting time, avoid scheduling one late on a Friday afternoon. Consider a noon hour meeting with a brown bag lunch as an alternative.**

**State Your Objective** Every meeting needs objectives. The reason for the meeting should be clearly presented in the leader's opening statement.

**Prepare An Agenda** An agenda is a must. It should be prepared in advance and may even be distributed *before* the meeting. The agenda serves as a roadmap to keep discussion on the topic and within original timeframes.

**Manage Meeting Time** Always start on time and keep things moving toward an announced ending time. Avoid wasting time but allow sufficient time for participants to

become involved so that they are satisfied with the outcomes.

**Take Charge** Effective control and guidance are two responsibilities of the meeting leader. You should encourage less active participants to speak up and control those who attempt to dominate. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to present his or her point of view. Start on schedule and keep things moving toward an announced ending time.

**Be Selective When Choosing Participants** Meetings are expensive so you want to in-

vite the minimum amount of appropriate people. Smaller numbers will hold interest and increase participation. Advise attendees who are only needed for part of the meeting that they may leave when that topic is concluded. They will probably thank you for being considerate of their limited time.

**Close With A Summary** Every meeting should close with a restatement of the meeting's objective, a summary of what was accomplished toward the objective and a review of agreed-upon action to be taken.

### Example of a Problem-Solving Meeting Agenda

- Opening statement—reason for attendance, objective, time commitment (5 minutes)
- Problems to be discussed with the group (5 minutes)
- Generation of alternative solutions (15 minutes)
- Decide among alternatives (20 minutes)
- Develop plan/assign tasks (25 minutes)
- Summarize meeting/ meeting evaluation (10 minutes)

**DO NOT** hold a meeting when there is inadequate preparation or data or *just* because it's usually held every second Tuesday. It may be unnecessary.

**DO NOT** hold a meeting on trivial subjects or when something can be communicated just as well by phone or memo.

### Do Ask for Feelings and Opinions in Meetings

The success of any meeting depends upon participation. The skillful use of questions like these will encourage discussion:

What is your reaction to...?

How do you feel about...?

What brings you to conclude that ...?

What is your thinking on ...?



## Your Worksheet for Planning a Meeting—Ask Yourself These Questions

1. **Objective:** What key results do you want to achieve?
2. **Timing:** How long should the meeting last? When and where is the best time to hold it?
3. **Participants:** Who should attend? Be sure to include those with authority to decide, those whose commitment is needed, and those with a need to know. Be sure participant notification includes the date, time, place and a copy of the agenda if advance preparation is required.
4. **Agenda:** What items should be dealt with? Who is responsible for preparing and distributing the agenda? If an advance copy of the agenda is to be distributed, it should go out 3-7 days before the meeting.
5. **Physical Arrangement:** What facilities and equipment are required? How should the meeting room be arranged? Generally, classroom style (participants face the front of the room) is preferred for informational meetings and conference style (participants face each other) is better for decision-making meetings. Check all A/V equipment beforehand to be sure it is in working order.

**When conducting a meeting the leader should:**

**Start Promptly**

**Follow the Agenda**

**Elicit Participation**

**Help Resolve Conflicts**

**Clarify Actions**

**Summarize**

### The Effective Use of Questions When Conducting a Meeting

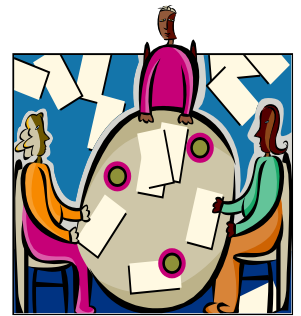
**When you want to stimulate discussion,** ask the *group* a general question.

**When you want to cut off discussion,** ask an *individual* to summarize the discussion.

**When two people have been debating a point without much progress,** ask *each* participant to summarize the other's position.

**When two participants are engaging in a side conversation,** ask *one* of the individuals a specific question.

**When discussion has been going on for some time and you're unclear of the progress,** ask the *group* for a summary.

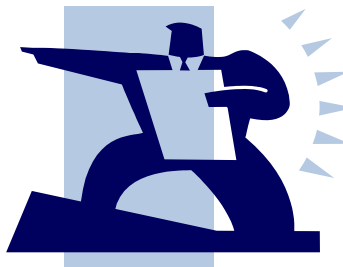


There are a number of responsibilities that every meeting leader needs to address during a meeting.

Following the agenda and managing the use of time are critical to successfully completing the meeting's objective.

Eliciting participation may be required but the leader should also be prepared to limit and/or control

#### Managing The Meeting When You Are The Leader



discussions and help resolve conflicts if people get off track.

Summarizing results and clarifying actions to be taken in the future are additional roles that fall to the meeting leader.

Meeting leadership is as much about managing people and communications as it is about managing tasks.

It is important to close every meeting with a restatement of objective, a summary of what was accomplished and a list of agreed action that needs to be taken.

Also, future meetings can be improved by soliciting feedback and distributing meeting evaluation forms to the participants. Below is an example of an evaluation form.

**Questions??**

**Contact Us at:**

**University**

**Human Resources,**

**Learning &**

**Professional**

**Development**

**Meeting Evaluation Form**

Please rate this meeting on the criteria listed below according to this scale:

Not at all	Barely	Somewhat	Mostly	Greatly	Completely
1	2	3	4	5	6
This meeting achieved the stated purpose.					_____
This meeting followed the ground rules.					_____
This meeting stayed on target .					_____
This meeting encouraged participation by all.					_____
This meeting ended with an action plan.					_____
Suggestions? _____					

### Test Your Knowledge of Effective Meetings

Consider each of the statements below and indicate whether you Agree (A) or Disagree (D).

- \_\_\_ A meeting is always the best way to communicate information to a group.
- \_\_\_ Most ineffective meetings can be avoided through good pre-planning.
- \_\_\_ Meetings should start and end on time.
- \_\_\_ An effective leader will be able to answer all questions asked by the group.
- \_\_\_ Participants should leave a meeting feeling that their time was well spent.
- \_\_\_ Practicing proper techniques helps produce effective meetings.
- \_\_\_ It's important in preparing for a meeting to ensure the right people attend.
- \_\_\_ Sending out a summary after the meeting supports achieving later results.
- \_\_\_ A good opening statement will help clarify the meeting's objective.
- \_\_\_ The leader always knows how well a meeting went.

Recommended Responses can be found on the bottom of Page 2 in this Toolkit.

**Many meetings run too long.**

**After 90 minutes participants begin to lose concentration.**

**Be sure to give breaks to restore energy or consider holding a second meeting in the near future.**