

Is There Really Such a Thing as a GOOD Meeting?

There are good meetings and there are even great meetings! You may remember one where a real need was addressed and handled. It felt good knowing something was REALLY accomplished. You can capture that feeling again in future meetings since much of the success lies in the care and attention given to good meeting design and management.

First, do not call a meeting unless something productive will be accomplished. Most meetings are held to reach decisions, solve a problem, communicate essential information or gain acceptance of or generate new ideas. Keep in mind that people who attend meetings want to feel they are spending their time wisely and making a contribution.

Begin by preparing a short, clearly written agenda that leaves no doubt about the purpose and importance of the meeting. Look at it objectively and consider whether the need is great enough to call a meeting. Let's assume it is. Check with your chairman and/or others important to the meeting as to their availability. Then, notify everyone involved well enough ahead of time so it can be added to individual schedules and ask them to RSVP. This will help to assure a quorum. Provide a succinct packet of meeting materials, including the agenda and minutes of the prior meeting, to each person planning to attend, giving them at least one week in advance to reflect on the topics. These materials will better prepare participants to provide input as well as to see that this is a meeting they will not want to miss. Don't forget to include the date, time, and confirmed location (including room name or number) on the agenda.

Now, consider the meeting environment. Is the meeting space conducive to good decision making? A meeting room should be small enough to accommodate the number of participants but large enough to be comfortable. This provides for better interaction and expression. Other things to consider are lighting, room temperature, acoustics (how well everyone can hear), and good food (water and coffee, at least, are always appreciated). Would a person with a disability attend? Be prepared by holding the meeting in an accessible meeting space and inquire in advance as to any needed accommodations (deadlines for such requests can be established).

Participants appreciate:

- 1) Keeping meetings as short as possible
- 2) Starting on time
- 3) Having expectations clearly defined
- 4) Following the agenda and staying focused (may require a facilitator)
- 5) Ending on time and on a positive note—mission accomplished!
- 6) Only having to attend meetings periodically

As a suggestion, **make sure everyone's voice is heard** during the meeting even if it means asking those who are quiet to express their views. Drawing them out may make them feel more a part of the group, feel that they have contributed something other than just their attendance, and feel more at ease and willing to participate. On the other hand, monitor discussions so some participants don't talk too much or monopolize the meeting.

On agenda items when appropriate, **try brainstorming**. In other words, explore alternatives together as you search for answers and solutions. Keep the discussion moving and vibrant among all participants. The more excitement and enthusiasm generated, the greater likelihood of truly creative ideas and solutions. Then, convert those ideas and solutions into action!

The energy of meetings can allow them to take on their own character spontaneously. They can actually be special and sometimes even fun. Also, the meeting leader can put a different "spin" on information that needs to be communicated and discussed. Storytelling is one way to get a point across because stories generate emotion and make information easier to remember.

Here are some tips to help make meetings shorter:

- 1) Include reports on the agenda only if they require a response from the group. Distribute them in advance with the meeting packet so participants can be ready to act on them, along with "good to know" reports. During the meeting, these other reports can be acknowledged and members asked if they have any questions.
- 2) Do not read material to the group that they can read for themselves, including minutes from the prior meeting that should be sent out in advance.
- 3) Limit the number of line items in a budget presentation as much as possible to focus discussion on major items and not minor ones such as office supplies.

Other tips:

- 1) For each topic heading on an agenda, be sure it is clear, allow a certain amount of time, and provide an “anticipated action” such as discussion only or consideration and vote. Give the name of the person making the presentation and if that person is unable to attend, make arrangements for the information to be passed on to the group as planned. Consider putting really important issues a little later on the agenda to allow for participation by members who may arrive late, allow sufficient time for discussion, and be sure all applicable information is available.
- 2) Have extra copies of all material in case participants don’t have their copy.
- 3) Greet members and make them feel welcome. If they do not know each other, introduce them or have them introduce themselves. Consider always providing name tags so names are not forgotten. Create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere with opportunities for socializing and networking before and after the meeting.
- 4) Assign someone to take and later transcribe minutes.
- 5) If tasks are assigned, be clear about deadlines and responsibilities.
- 6) Procedural issues can be addressed by consulting Robert’s Rules of Order. Find a plain English version, review it, and keep

it handy. You may or may not use it, but it’s good information to have at your fingertips.

7) When presenting less than interesting material, divide it into smaller pieces, use transition material such as visuals to make the information clearer and more meaningful, ask questions, allow for thoughtful interaction by participants, and take frequent breaks.

8) Before adjournment, discuss dates and times of upcoming events and activities as well as checking personal schedules for future meetings. Summarize goals achieved so participants leave feeling successful and willing to attend your next meeting.

Having great meetings does require work, but when people are motivated and decisions are put into action, it’s worth all the effort!

Resources

Effective Meetings – Tips
www.meetingwizard.org/meetings/effective-meetings.cfm

How to Make Meetings Work by Michael Doyle and David Straus
www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0515090484/meetingwizard/103-1023517-8675010

CarverGuide, 5, Planning Better Board Meetings by John Carver
www.josseybass.com or call 877.762.2974



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The Center for Craft, Creativity and Design's Craft Research Fund seeks to advance scholarship in the field of craft by supporting high-quality research undertaken by university faculty, graduate students, museum curators, artists and independent scholars.

Deadline: January 10, 2005
Information: 828.890.2050 or www.craftcreativitydesign.org/research/grants.php

The Creativity in Motion/Thatcher Hoffman Smith Prize celebrates a visionary creative work or project under way at the time of application. It is open to all fields of creativity.

Deadline: January 15, 2005
Information: 405.325.2347 or <http://cim.ou.edu>

The Kerr Foundation, Inc. supports 501(c)(3) organizations in the visual and performing arts areas, as well as museums and libraries that provide new or enhanced opportunities, particularly to the young. Project categories include capital, projects and operating. Favorable consideration of a proposal will normally be in the form of a challenge grant.

Deadline: January 21, 2005
Information: 405.749.7991 or www.thekerrfoundation.org/guidelines.htm