

"My meetings accomplish what we need to do, but they take longer than I planned."

"We have good meetings, but we never seem to get anywhere with what we decided."

"I hate going to meetings. I call them 'pant shining opportunities.'"

Meetings can be an irritation, a thing to be endured, or they can be a point of connection and efficient decision making. Here are some quick tips to keep meetings moving.

1. Plan first. Begin by keeping a list of agenda items as time goes by. Be sure to include not only the item, but also who suggested it (Item Owner) and who will be responsible for actionable items. If there aren't any agenda items, don't be afraid to check with attendees for items. If there still aren't any items, cancel the meeting and communicate the next date and time to the group.
2. Create an agenda. A couple of days before the meeting, sit down with your list and begin by jotting down a time estimate and a priority number next to each item. Then create a document listing all attendees and each item in priority order: including the person responsible and the time estimate.
3. Distribute the agenda. E-Mail or fax the agenda to all involved. Remind them that the meeting will begin on time, asking them to be prompt.

Now that you've set the stage for an effective meeting, let's look at some tools to make the meeting efficient.

1. Begin on time. If there is socializing to be done, do it before or after the meeting. This shows respect for others' schedules and commitments.
2. Keep detailed meeting notes. Note discussion points and brainstorming ideas alongside the agenda items. Keep a separate sheet for listing decisions, action items, and future agenda items.
3. Use good discussion techniques:
 - Start by asking the Item Owner to summarize the topic, the issues involved, what is needed to successfully resolve the item, and any discussion questions. Remind everyone of the time estimate allowed for the item.

- Use appropriate techniques for the discussion: brainstorming – generate ideas without determining their value; “go around” – simply ask each person around the table to offer feedback; “reflect and comment” – ask for 30-60 seconds of quiet time to reflect, then invite comments. Don’t be afraid of conflict; it can produce valid options that otherwise not be voiced.
- Move to resolve the discussion. List the actions to be taken, who is responsible for each, what the timetable is for completion, and who will report back to the group. If a decision is to be made, determine if there is consensus or if a vote or poll should be done.

4. Stay on time and on track. Do not allow items to take more than their allotted time. If further review is needed, additional time can be negotiated with attendees or this can be done outside the meeting. If a different concern or issue is mentioned, offer to discuss it at the end of the meeting if time permits or place it on the agenda for the next meeting.
5. Use tools like flip charts and white boards. Listing brainstorming suggestions, information, and other ideas as people bring them up can make them feel accurately heard as well as facilitate note taking.
6. End the meeting on time, unless you negotiated differently. Remind people of the time and location of the next meeting.

Within 24 hours, send a meeting summary listing items discussed, decisions made, the action item list, and initial agenda items for the next meeting.

Meetings can be energizing and a point of connection for the participants when they are prepared for in advance, kept on time, well organized, contain good conversation with give and take, and advance the work at hand.

Kathleen can be contacted at:

kkfriesen@friesengroup.net

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