

Running A Meeting



Don't let your meetings be the ones people dread going to! While meetings will be necessary from time to time, make sure that each one has a clear purpose and that you use the group's time effectively. And if there is time to have a little fun, make sure it happens!

The basic principles behind a successful meeting are preparation, facilitation, inspiration, and results.

In **preparing** for a meeting, your agenda should have a clear, stated purpose. Participants should be given enough advance notice to put the meeting on their

calendar. Preparation also includes reserving a/v equipment, reserving meeting space, sending reminder emails, and catering if necessary.

Facilitation of the meeting means that you are responsible for keeping everybody on track. The plan for the meeting should be laid out on the agenda. Depending on the purpose and time of your meeting, you may want to allow room for some general side conversation at the beginning or you may need to hold the reins to be productive. As the meeting begins you could give everybody "90 seconds of fame" to share what they've been working on since the last meeting. Another option is to do "highs and lows" where folks share one high and low moment from the past week.

During the meeting, you should remain impartial and make sure everybody speaks. If somebody begins to dominate, it is your job to invite others to speak on the topic. You do not need to be rude or dogmatic, but simple invitations are all that some folks need in order to speak up. Consider saying, "I'd like to hear from Jane on this issue," or "Can somebody from the engineering team talk about their perspective." Most people will get the hint and realize they have been dominating the floor. If not, you or another leader may need to pull them aside if the problem persists and come up with a plan for that person to only speak after 4 others have spoken, for example.

If a certain topic goes on longer than you've intended and you need to move on, many leaders will begin to summarize what everybody has said. This requires active listening. You can say, "OK, here's what I've been hearing from the group..." to end discussion. Then you can either table the issue or state another course of action.

To **inspire** group members, the leader should display some charisma as well. While attention to detail is important, you don't want to forget about spontaneity and enthusiasm! These two traits

can make meetings fun and will encourage your group members to return. Try to build in occasional activities that engage participants, generate discussion, or use visual aids to grab their attention.

Results mean that every meeting has a specific purpose and worked towards the group's goals. Even a social meeting could be working towards the goal of group cohesion and solidarity. Most participants will want to feel that something has been accomplished during the meeting. At some point you will want to show participants how their action fits into the bigger picture so that they understand both their and the group's purpose. Achievements and difficult decisions made in one meeting should be recapped in the following meeting in case people were absent or need reminded about changes.

After the meeting, distribute minutes when appropriate to all members within 3 or 4 days. This will reinforce the importance of the meeting and reduce errors in people's memory. Make sure that you discuss on problems during the meeting with other leaders of the group. Come up with improvements when possible. Some group members appreciate a follow up email that clarifies their responsibilities that might have been delegated during the meeting.

Put any unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting. Periodically, leaders should ask group members to evaluate meetings and make improvements where possible. Of course, you will want to ask the most honest group members and not those who are your friends since they may not be thinking in terms of improving your leadership style.