49 Tips, Strategies & Ideas to make your meetings more effective

Not all of these ideas will work for every meeting. Pick and choose the ones you think will work for you. But don't dismiss some just because you have never heard of them or because they sound strange – try them – all of these work for most meetings!

1. Don't hold a regular meeting without determining if there is anything to cover.

2. Abolish general business completely. The best meetings no longer have general business. Use the strategy below.

3. Adopt the principle of allowing no business to be discussed unless it is on the agenda. Allow anything to be placed on the agenda but have a cut off time for submitting items to be placed on the agenda. Distribute it and then allow nothing else to be raised unless it is very important and urgent and gets the approval of the majority of the meeting to discuss it.

4. Make sure that everyone who needs to make a report is prepared.

5. Use a whiteboard agenda in an open place so everyone can add and see what everyone else has added for the agenda.

6. Make sure everyone receives their agenda before the meeting.

7. Be tough. Insist that if you have not received an agenda for a meeting, you will not attend the meeting and direct your staff to do the same.

8. Start every meeting on time, regardless of who is missing.

9. If there is no quorum at starting time, start an informal discussion on the items and ratify your decisions as soon as the quorum appears.

10. Set the room as much as possible as a circular or "in the round" style rather than theatre style (rows). You will get much greater participation and less conflict.

11. For every item on the agenda, mark it with a ***D*** for decision required, or ***I*** for information only item. It gives more focus to the discussion.

12. For every item on the agenda, make sure that the expected outcome is clear on the agenda, not just a topic. For instance, rather than listing "*Computer*" or "*Computer software*", list it as: "*Computer software - Decision to be made about which Word Processing software the organisation will buy. Glen to recommend Office365*. By making it this detailed, the discussion is likely to be reduced enormously (*assuming that Glen has the authority and credibility to make the recommendation*).

13. Choose a comfortable room. Rooms that are too warm make meetings go longer and increase conflict. (*Cold rooms make for quick meetings!)*

14. Make sure everyone receives the minutes immediately after the meeting - within hours or even minutes.
    Giving the minutes out at the next meeting shows a total lack of understanding of the purpose of the minutes.

15. Make your minutes "action" oriented. Focus on what needs to be done, not on who said what.

16. Eliminate waffle and red herrings by agreeing on a code of conduct for meetings. (Use the ***Bill of Rights for Meetings*** as your starting point to develop your own code of conduct) The Bill of Rights is in the Bonus section of the course.

17. Ensure that the person in the chair is fair, firm and focused.

18. Develop a culture and understanding that the meeting participants may raise "points of order" if they feel the meeting is getting off the track or not moving forward efficiently. Don't rely totally on the chair.

19. Make sure everyone knows the decision making process and how to initiate a decision when discussion has gone on long enough.

20. Have a large analog clock in the room with a moving second hand - you'll be amazed at the impact it has on time management in the meeting. Digital clocks do not work nearly as well for this!

21. Recognise, acknowledge and deal with conflict. The more openly conflict is dealt with, the more effective the meeting.

22. Start each meeting with a positive reminder of the purpose of the group and the specific purpose of the meeting. Some groups call this “The Charge”. There is a sample “Charge” in the course documents

23. Remember, the purpose of nearly every meeting is to review and to plan. Reminding participants of that can bring greater focus.

24. Try to minimise the use of the word *"discuss"*. It tends to mean free for all and open discussion which tends to become unfocussed. Instead, list the specific points which need to be addressed to reach a conclusion.

25. Use a whiteboard for multi option decisions so people can evaluate visually.

26. Make everyone is crystal clear about the authority of the meeting to make the decisions it considers.

27. Remember that *no action* is sometimes better than taking action. Sometimes there will be situations where it is better to sit back or do nothing and wait rather than precipitate action. A deliberate decision to *do nothing* is OK in certain circumstances.

28. Only have present at your meeting those people who need to be there.

29. Allow people to "come and go" when there are many agenda items across a range of topics. It is ridiculous to expect people to sit while others discuss a matter of no relevance to them.

30. Adopt a mentality of allowing (and even encouraging) people to bring in other work to do while the meeting is engaged in an issue in which they have no contribution to make.

31. Make sure that for every decision, there is a recommendation for the meeting to consider. If there is no recommendation, then delay the item until there is. If you do begin addressing the issue, make it clear that an idea, recommendation or suggestion is required quickly to focus the discussion.

32. As a person chairing the meeting, be positive, friendly and when appropriate, be light hearted without being frivolous.

33. Make sure that every problem that is addressed is separated from the people involved so that it can be addressed objectively.

34. Summarize frequently and especially at decision making time. If you are not in the chair, ask for a summary or seek approval to give it yourself.

35. When you are speaking, be concise and objective.

36. Tackle your opponents' arguments positively and if possible acknowledge their opposition before they have had the chance to speak - it takes some of the wind from their sails - that way you can present the arguments in your own terms.

37. Remember that *"loud mouths"* and *"ego driven"* people win battles but not wars. They get people off side and when there is a decision, the ambivalent people will often vote against them for the sake of it!

38. Remember especially that people who are in the chair who are *"loud mouths"* and *"ego driven"* people, gain no respect, lower morale and their meetings become almost, if not completely ineffective. Choose fair and reasonable people to chair your meetings.

39. It is almost universally true (with very few exceptions) that one of the worst characteristics in a person who chairs a meeting is that they constantly give their own opinion. Over time people do not offer alternative views and so the decisions become less effective.

40. Recognise that the person in the chair is but one voice. Adopt a meeting mentality that the chair is the servant of the meeting, not its boss. The role is to facilitate decision making. A good leader understands this perfectly.

41. Use a competent person to chair your meetings regularly. Chairing meetings is a skill, a bit like first aid. If you have a person who can do it well, use them, regardless of their "rank" or position.

42. Understand the difference between the content of the meeting (*the "what"*) and the process of the meeting (*the "how"*). The person in the chair should focus on the process more than the content.

43. If you are in the chair, leave your comments until last. If you do this, you will find you earn enormous respect. Also, by the time you get to speak, it is highly likely that someone else has presented the same view you hold anyway. By letting someone else do it, you maintain your own impartiality.

44. Above all else, be impartial when you are in the chair and insist on it from others who may be in the chair at meetings you attend.

45. Involve the minute taker in the meeting by asking for the points to be repeated before a decision is made and to summarize the points covered.

46. If you are still having a person read the minutes aloud to your meeting, rename yourself the historical society. Reading aloud of minutes is a practice of literally decades ago. With today’s technology, there is no reason why minutes should be read. If you attend a community group which is still quaint and reads the minutes, then "move that the minutes be taken as read" as soon as the person reading begins.

47. Make sure your minute taker is allowed to sit next to the chair. (A good chairman will insist on it anyway)

48. Remember the old saying - "*A short meeting is a good meeting*". It is true that a decision which takes a long time, is rarely better, and often worse than a decision taken with efficiency. How do we know this? Because research shows that a decision which takes a long time to make is nearly always raised for further discussion at the next meeting and often reversed. Efficient decisions tend not to suffer the same fate.

49. ***A meeting (and people generally) will rise to the level of efficiency demanded and expected of it (them), and fall to the level of efficiency they can get away with.***

Sad but true - universally!

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