

How to Conduct Better Meetings



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HOW TO CONDUCT BETTER MEETINGS

Surveys have indicated that a typical meeting attendee views them as being 2.3 times a long as they should be. Since meetings are vital to a project's success, the secret lies in simply making them more efficient. Here are ten ways to conduct better meetings.

1. Inform and remind team of purpose just before meeting.

By informing attendees just before they are not only less likely to forget it but they will also come with any material or information needed to support the discussion topics. Often an attendee will be asked a question which requires them to leave the meeting to get needed information. When this happens, they may get diverted and never return to the meeting.

2. Minimize participants.

Invite only those who are truly needed. As the number of participants goes up so does the tendency to get bogged down. Often, those who are not needed will show up to obtain any information resulting from the meeting. They are referred to as "secondary attendees," and they often begin asking a lot of questions that divert the meeting from its intended focus to one of bringing that person "up to speed." If a meeting summary is produced, then there is less likelihood of having secondary attendees.

3. Establish and follow an agenda.

As a rule, every meeting should have an agenda that has at least three points; the *topics*, the *time* allocated for each topic, and the "*talker*," the one who is taking the lead for a given topic. It is a good practice to issue a proposed agenda before the meeting to solicit inputs and to gain a better "buy-in." It also identifies other topics that may be pertinent to the meeting discussions.

Time	Topic	Who	How	Objective
1:50	Meeting Purpose	Mary	Review and discuss	Agree on purpose
2:00	Team schedule status	All	Report & discuss	Identify any slips and corrective actions
2:20	Design problem	George	Ishikawa diagram	Identify all possible causes
2:50	Wrap up	Mary	Summarize& reach consensus	List and assign action items

4. State the purpose and intended outcome.

Meeting leaders should not assume that everyone automatically understands the meeting purpose and the desired outcomes. By stating them clearly at the beginning, it will get the meeting started quickly and keep it on track.

5. Attempt to involve each team member.

Meetings can often get off balance when a few attendees do all the talking and dominate the discussions. The meeting leader should attempt to involve each member to ensure that group synergy occurs. Periodically asking everyone to summarize things from their point of view, or simply asking for their inputs can do this.

6. Use diagrams, pictures and graphics.

The old adage, “a picture is worth a thousand words” is no truer than in meetings. They can reduce meeting durations by as much 28%. Whenever practical, encourage participants to use diagrams, pictures and graphics instead of handing out pages full of text.

7. Park important but unrelated topics.

There may be times when an important topic, which is not on the agenda, will come up. Rather than divert the focus of the meeting, it may be better to list (park) the topics for another meeting. It is important however that another meeting be held so that these topics are not simply brushed aside.

8. Record action items, actionees, and due dates.

Many times meeting discussions are very interactive but if the results are not translated into action items may fail to be productive. Almost every meeting should conclude with a) a description of actions to be taken, b) who has accepted the action, and c) when the action item is to be completed.

9. Issue a brief written meeting summary.

Taking a few minutes to document a meeting can go a long way. By summarizing a) who attended, b) main topics discussed, c) conclusions reached, and d) actions to be taken, information will be easily recorded and disseminated. Meeting summaries should be kept to one page containing “bullet-type” statements.

10. Periodically measure the effectiveness of the project meetings.

When project meetings begin being held many meetings will often be the most ineffective due to new participants, circumstances, unfamiliarity with roles, etc. By periodically measuring a meeting’s effectiveness, they can often be brought to a higher level of efficiency. This is accomplished by having each participant fill out a brief questionnaire that contains statements relative to a meeting (e.g. was an agenda used, did we stay on track, were the right participants there, etc.). Meeting questionnaires are shown on the following pages.

Meeting Critique Form No. 1

Please insert the number that most closely represents your feelings:

Strongly disagree=1; Strongly agree=5

Agenda	Score
1. An agenda was made available to all participants prior to the meeting.	_____
2. The objectives of the meeting were clearly stated in the agenda.	_____
3. Agenda items were appropriate for this group at this type of meeting.	_____
4. The agenda contained just the right number of items for the time available.	_____
Meeting Type/Space/Size/Composition	
5. This meeting was necessary to address the topics of concern.	_____
6. The type of meeting was appropriate to the task/occasion.	_____
7. The right kinds of people were in attendance.	_____
8. The size of the group was appropriate.	_____
9. The meeting room was of appropriate size and arrangement.	_____
Meeting Process	
10. The agenda was closely followed.	_____
11. The meeting started and finished on time.	_____
12. The meeting met the stated objective(s).	_____
13. The meeting accomplished its purpose.	_____
14. Decisions were made effectively.	_____
15. Ground rules were established and followed.	_____
16. There were no “meeting robbers” present.	_____
17. Time utilization was effective.	_____
18. Summary agreements were made and action items assigned.	_____
Facilitator/Recorder (If Meeting was Facilitated)	
19. Facilitator kept the group focused on common task.	_____
20. Facilitator kept the meeting moving.	_____
21. Facilitator brought group to closure, agreeing on action items.	_____
22. Recorder captured the basic ideas of the meeting.	_____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Meeting Critique Form No. 2

Meeting Aspect	Score: 1-10 (10 is best)
1. Overall, how effective was the meeting?	
2. Was there an agenda and a meeting purpose reviewed at the beginning of the meeting?	
3. Did the meeting stay on track?	
4. Did each team member have a chance to contribute to the meeting?	
5. Did the meeting achieve its intended purpose?	
6. Were outside distractions minimized so the meeting could run efficiently?	
7. Were the right people and the right quantity present?	
8. Did everyone come prepared?	
9. Was conflict handled in a constructive manner?	
10. Were action items clearly identified and assigned?	

TOTAL SCORE _____