Successful Team Meetings

Meetings have a bad reputation. In a recent Harris Poll, 46 percent of respondents said they'd prefer to do almost anything else instead of sitting in a status meeting. Yet, meetings are important. They are collaborative ventures, opportunities to bring people together to share ideas and recalibrate efforts toward the common goal. It is *how* an organization runs its meetings that makes the difference, and is a defining part of a company culture.

Why It Matters

Productive meetings translate into productive teams. Think of your role as hosting a forum. Your job is to highlight what's important, get people involved and facilitate discussion. The ultimate goal: if you're unable to attend, the meeting can go on without you.

Brain focus and clarity are enhanced by "novelty." If we do things the same way every meeting, the predictableness will get boring. Try a different approach!

How It's Done

To execute successful team meetings, follow these general guidelines.

Be respectful of time

Perhaps the most powerful way to elevate a meeting's value is to respect everyone's time.

- **Start on time.** Waiting for latecomers indicates being late is acceptable.
- **Set time slots for each agenda item.** Keeping to the schedule focuses on discussions.
- **Set reasonable meeting lengths.** We often set team meetings for one hour, regardless if it's necessary. Try 30 minutes.
- **End meetings on time.** This fosters respect and builds trust.

Create an agenda

- In addition to your own agenda items, solicit items from team members and circulate before the meeting, setting a time slot for each discussion.
- Ensure contributions rotate so all voices are heard regularly.
- Create roles. As the leader, your role is to be the facilitator. Designate note takers and timekeepers to share responsibility and ownership.

Elicit voices in the room

Start off the meeting ensuring everyone is present and engaged. Does your agenda include contributions from a mix of people or are the same people talking again? Rotate meeting roles. Team members feel more connected to the goal when they are actively contributing.

Agree on an action plan

Summarize the meeting with a fast pass through the agenda, highlighting takeaways, deliverables, and deadlines. Email the summary to the team immediately after the meeting. Follow up during the next meeting. If you don't, you're wasting people's time and undermining the meeting's value.

Optional: Use sharing software

Consider turning your agenda into a single living document. Team members can add agenda items, add or correct notes, and supply supporting references or documentation.

PRACTICE

- Discuss guidelines and ground rules at the beginning of the meeting (if those were not already established in prior meetings with this team). For example:
    - One person talks at a time
    - Challenging ideas (not individuals) is welcome
- Spend a few minutes breaking the ice. For example, ask team members to share a win since the last meeting.
- Ensure that different opinions and perspectives are discussed.
- Avoid delaying decisions unless key data is missing.
- If needed, assign one person responsible for getting the data, and complete the conversation either by email or at the next team meeting.
- At regular intervals, ask team members for feedback after a meeting. For example:
    - What worked?
    - What could we improve?

RESOURCES

Making Meetings Matter: How Smart Leaders Orchestrate Powerful Conversations in the Digital Age James Ware

The Surprising Science Behind Remote Meetings Sloan Review

Mastering the Team Meeting. HBSWK.hbs.edu