



50 Ways to Make Meetings More Effective

Meetings do not have to be time wasters. Use the following suggestions as a checklist to ensure that you are doing everything you can to make your meetings more effective.

1. Determine the need. If a meeting is not necessary to accomplish the objective, don't hold one. Time spent in meetings is time taken away from all the other important things you might prefer to be doing.
2. Investigate the feasibility of making a conference call to eliminate the necessity of a meeting.
3. Beware of regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., second Tuesday of every month).
Call meetings only as required, to solve problems, make decisions, communicate important information, and so on.
4. Try to schedule all business meetings that are outside the office either at the beginning or the end of the day. There is nothing more unproductive for a business day than traveling to and from another place and having to take the time to pick up work you had to interrupt, upon returning. The solution is to avoid middle-of-the-day meetings unless they are absolutely necessary.
5. Don't be trapped into meeting for lunch. Regardless of what people say, you are not combining the two objectives. You are dragging out meetings. If you want to go for lunch for relaxation, fine, but complete your business before you go.
6. Consider breakfast meetings; they consume less time, and people are normally more alert.
7. Try to hold meetings in someone else's office so you can leave if you want to. You probably won't want to but at least the option is open to you.
8. Schedule some of your own brief meetings late in the day, or just before lunch. This scheduling gives you ending time to work towards. But make an exception when you need everyone mentally alert.
9. Keep the group as small as possible. Invite only those who must be there. The smaller the group, the easier it is to control - and the faster you'll get finished.

10. Beware of the costs of meetings and make sure everyone else is aware of the cost as well. Twenty attendees earning only \$10 per hour amounts to \$200 per hour.
11. Send out an agenda well in advance. Make up the agenda with priority items listed first. Don't keep using the same format. Juggle the items according to their importance at the time.
12. The agenda should indicate the people who will be in attendance, the starting time, stopping time, items to be discussed, who is to make the various presentation, time allocated to each item and the overall objective(s) of the meeting.
13. Don't cram too much into the agenda. Skipping hastily over important items in order to finish on schedule is not a time-saver in the long run.
14. Allow time for "unscheduled items" and include these on the agenda, complete with time allotment.
15. When making up the agenda, explain the items more fully, and record in the form of a question when appropriate, to encourage advance thinking and preparation (e.g., Don't record "Conveyor System"; record the question, "Should the current roller conveyor system be replaced by a belt conveyor?").
16. Include a map with the meeting notice if there is any doubt whether everyone knows how to get to the meeting site.
17. To encourage people to arrive on time, schedule a brief but interesting or provocative item first - one that no one will want to miss.
18. Tell each participant in advance what he or she is expected to contribute. Give them every opportunity to come prepared.
19. Use a checklist to ensure adequate facilities and equipment before the meeting starts. Lack of a spare projector bulb or magic markers gone dry can waste everyone's time.
20. Circulate reports in advance. Don't waste everyone's time by reading long reports or letters during the meeting.
21. Control the seating arrangement with place cards. Separate adversaries. Keeping them on the same side of the table will reduce eye contact, thereby reducing the opportunities for conflict.
22. Schedule meetings to start at odd times, such as 9:15 A.M. or 10:45 A.M. Meetings called at even times, such as 9:00 A.M. or 10:00 A.M., do not have the ring of urgency to them.
23. Announce the "rules of the game" before you start the meeting - i.e., that you will be keeping to the agenda, controlling the length of discussion, interrupting those who go off on tangents, etc.
24. Write the objective of the meeting on a flipchart for everyone to see. With the objective in plain view, participants are reminded not to wander off target.

25. Start on time, don't summarize for every late arrival, and don't carry on a conversation with them as they arrive.
26. If one person is consistently late, try scheduling his or her presentation first on the agenda as a motivation to arrive on time.
27. If a few people are always late, consider listing "late arrivals" on the minutes, as well as those present and absent.
28. If you have a "meeting hog" in the group, confront him or her in advance of the meeting and ask for cooperation in helping to draw out quieter members of the group.
29. If you're the chairperson, be enthusiastic and businesslike. The chairperson sets the tone of the meeting.
30. Make the meeting as interesting as possible, and prepare well for your part in the presentation.
31. Avoid sarcasm or personal criticism at all times during the meeting. It causes resentment and stifles participation.
32. Use the meeting for "praise in public" opportunities, such as recognizing anniversaries with the company, special awards, etc.
33. When individuals are discussing the topic at hand, don't let more loquacious members interrupt them.
34. Be alert to the group's body language. If there are signs of boredom or frustration, call a five-minute stretch break.
35. Use visuals. Writing on a flipchart or blackboard helps people to concentrate, keeps them involved in the meeting, and increases chances of their remembering the material. Overheads are even better.
36. Stick to the agenda. Don't allow participants to sidetrack the meeting. Don't waste time discussing issues that contribute nothing to the objectives of the meeting.
37. Don't allow interruptions (unless a true emergency occurs). Post messages outside the meeting room and advise participants in advance that they can pick them up during coffee breaks or at lunch.
38. Don't get hung up on parliamentary procedure, unless, of course, you're a Member of Parliament.
39. Allow "stretch" breaks so participants can clear the cobwebs and remain active, contributing individuals. Consider a five or-10-minute break every hour.
40. Serve coffee outside the room at specific times. Leaving coffee inside encourages continual disruptions during the meeting.
41. If you have a luncheon meeting, get the important business talk out of the way before the food arrives. Once everyone starts eating, talk comes to a standstill. And after eating, people get sluggish and find it harder to concentrate on business.
42. Have someone periodically record the time remaining on a flipchart or blackboard for everyone to see.
43. Cut off trivia with "I know you'll handle that efficiently, so we won't have to worry about it here."

44. When the objective has been reached, end the meeting.
45. When the meeting's over, and you know there will be another one, decide the date, time and place while everyone is still there.
46. Issue minutes promptly following the meeting while the issues are still fresh in everyone's mind. Have deadlines on all follow-ups. Summarize the meeting on a "Meeting Action Sheet" and staple it on top of the minutes.
47. Keep minutes brief. Highlight decisions reached, action to be taken and responsibilities assigned.
48. Always evaluate the success of meetings. Ask what could be improved the next time. Judge success by the results obtained.
49. Use the meeting evaluation, and your own observations, to make improvements on future meetings.
50. Attend periodic seminars and read the latest books on meeting management to continually keep yourself aware of the more effective method of conducting meetings.