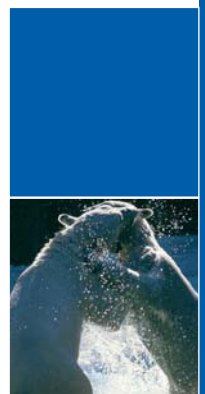


# CHAPTER 22

## EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

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## 1

## INTRODUCTION

**Meetings are essential. There is no alternative for meeting face-to-face in certain situations and interpersonal contacts can add a whole new dimension to working relationships. But many meetings waste a large amount of management and staff time. Some managers report that about 50% of their working time is spent in meetings. Additional time is involved in preparing for meetings and minute writing. A conscientious (and ongoing) effort needs to be made to minimise this time and to make meetings more effective, productive and satisfying.**

**Effective and constructive meetings focus on the issue(s) at hand, only include necessary participants and concentrate on reaching a workable conclusion. Preparation and discipline are vital. It also helps to make meetings practical and task-centred. These issues are elaborated upon in the following section.**

## 2

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS



**Evaluate the need** for each and every meeting. What are the aims or needs, and is a meeting the best way to achieve these?

Re-read the minutes of your recent meetings. Highlight any key decisions and action points. Assess their relative value against time spent. Then consider whether the outcome could have been achieved without a meeting, or in a shorter, more effective meeting.

In the future, after applying some of the tips given below, record the time each meeting takes and periodically review the situation.

**Think about who to invite:** Only invite those with a real interest. When in doubt, ask the potential participants whether they feel their attendance would be worthwhile, or whether they would like to contribute written views and be notified of the outcome instead.

Where staff members are only interested in certain agenda items, make sure they are able to attend only the relevant parts. This may involve amendments to the agenda to group their items.

**Get the timing right:** Meetings must start on time, otherwise valuable collective staff time is lost. Get everyone to agree that meetings will start on time from now on – then start exactly on time and expect an apology from anyone arriving late.

Schedule meetings to end at lunchtime or at the end of the day, providing a motivation to end on time. Avoid holding meetings first thing in the morning (staff like to arrange their work before attending), or straight after lunch (concentration is low).

Prepare a timed agenda indicating which items should be dealt with quickly.

**Plan ahead:** If possible, arrange the room so that members face each other, such as in a circle or semi-circle. For large groups, try U-shaped rows. Choose a location suitable to your group's size. Small rooms with too many people get stuffy and create tension. A larger room is more comfortable and encourages individual expression – but not too large as this creates an impersonal atmosphere.

Use visual aids for interest (e.g., posters, diagrams etc.). Display a large version of the agenda for staff members to refer to. Consider using aids such as flipcharts and post-it notes for collecting and analysing key points, or for brainstorming and subsequent analysis.

**Draft a good agenda:** Your agenda needs to include a brief description of the meeting objectives, a list of the topics to be covered and a list stating who will address each topic and for how long. Some other suggestions follow:

- Write or approve the agenda and reject any items that can be dealt with more effectively outside the meeting
- Condense the agenda so that the meeting can be completed on time
- Place most important items first, so if you run out of time unimportant items can be left
- Make the first item 'Action not completed', so you do not waste time in discussions on action already taken
- Do not waste time approving previous minutes, unless this is necessary in an official board meeting
- Make the agenda items sufficiently specific so people are able to prepare
- Issue briefing papers to cover any information points – so the meeting can be restricted to clarification and discussion, not recapping
- Make sure all papers are sent out in good time, to enable staff to prepare – and make it known that staff should be well prepared and concise
- When you send the agenda, you should include the time, date and location of the meeting and any background information participants will need to know to hold an informed discussion on the meeting topic.

The following is a suggested agenda format:

<b>Meeting Description:</b>			
<b>Purpose of Meeting:</b>			
<b>Date/Time:</b>			
<b>Location:</b>			
<b>Chair:</b>			
<b>Aim of Meeting:</b>			
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Who to Address</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>
1.			
2.			
3.			

**Opening the meeting** – some tips follow:

- Always start on time; this respects those who showed up on time and reminds latecomers that the scheduling is serious.
- Welcome participants and thank them for their time.
- State the aim(s) of the meeting.
- Review the agenda at the beginning of each meeting, giving participants a chance to understand all proposed major topics, change them and accept them.
- If a meeting recorder is being used, make the participants aware that minutes or action points are being taken and feed them back to each participant shortly after the meeting.



- Clarify your role(s) in the meeting.
- Stress the need for conciseness.

**Establish ground rules:** You do not need to develop new ground rules each time you have a meeting. However, it pays to have a few basic ground rules that can be used for most of your meetings. These ground rules cultivate the basic ingredients needed for a successful meeting.

You may also want a ground rule about confidentiality.

List your primary ground rules on the agenda. If you have new participants who are not used to your meetings, you might review each ground rule.

**FOUR POWERFUL GROUND RULES ARE: PARTICIPATE, GET FOCUSED, MAINTAIN MOMENTUM AND REACH CLOSURE.**

**Time management:** One of the most difficult facilitation tasks is time management – time seems to run out before tasks are completed. Therefore, the biggest challenge is maintaining momentum, to keep the process moving. You might ask participants to help you keep track of the time. If the planned time on the agenda is getting out of hand, present it to the group and ask for their input as to a resolution.

**Closing the meeting:** Always end meetings on time and attempt to end on a positive note. At the end of each meeting, review how well the meeting aims were met, as well as the agreed actions and assignments. Set the time for the next meeting and ask each person if they can make it or not (to get their commitment). Clarify that meeting minutes or actions resolved will be reported back to members in a week at most (this helps to keep momentum going).

## 3

### THE MEETING CHAIR

The chair needs to maintain order during the meeting and ensure that the agenda is dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Key duties of the chair include:

- Ensuring agendas and backing papers are sent out in good time
- Making ground rules clear
- Keeping time
- Making clear the timing and nature of each agenda item
- Ensuring that all remarks are directed through the chair, allowing only one speaker at a time
- Keeping contributions to the point and working through the agenda systematically
- Watching behaviour to bring any dissatisfaction into the open and to judge when more time is needed
- Ensuring that everybody who wants to, has an opportunity to contribute
- Ensuring that any necessary decisions are taken at the meeting
- Summing up each item (and action needed) clearly – both for the minutes secretary and to ensure agreement
- Ensuring physical arrangements (including need for breaks, drinks, food etc.) are taken care of
- Ensuring any equipment needed is in working order
- Thanking members and minutes secretary for their participation.



## MEETING MINUTES

# 4

Where possible, reduce minutes to a set of agreed action points. These can be agreed at the end of each topic and written up by a personal assistant. Often, laptop computers are now used in meetings, to make an instant record.

Other important points of agreement may also need to be recorded – but these should be rare, for example, changes to policy, strategy or organisational plans. These should be recorded and explained to all relevant staff, as well as amendments made to original plans and policies.

The time taken for the meeting should also be recorded, so a meeting assessment can be carried out.

### Other tips for minute writing include:

- Ensure that all of the essential elements are noted, such as type of meeting, name of the organisation, date and time, venue, name of the chair, main topics and the time of adjournment. If it is a formal or corporate meeting, include approval of previous minutes and all resolutions
- Prepare an outline based on the agenda ahead of time and leave plenty of white space for notes. By having the topics already written down, you can jump right on to a new topic without pause
- Prepare a list of expected participants and check off the names as people enter the room. Or, you can pass around an attendance sheet for everyone to sign as the meeting starts
- To be sure about who said what, make a map of the seating arrangement and make sure to ask for names of unfamiliar people
- Do not make the mistake of recording every single comment.



Example of Minutes Format:

<b>Name of Organisation:</b>				
<b>Purpose of Meeting:</b>				
<b>Date/Time:</b>				
<b>Chair:</b>				
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Points of Agreement</b>	<b>Action (Resolution)</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
1.				

## INFORMAL MEETINGS

# 5

A disciplined approach should also be taken at informal meetings. If you are asked to attend an informal meeting, let others know at the outset the maximum time you have available and are able to spend at the meeting.

If you are approached for an informal meeting, or visit another office for an informal meeting and have little time, stand up and remain standing as a signal that this is to be a short meeting.

Some managers walk around and have a brief word with staff on a regular basis (each morning). This is sometimes referred to as 'management by walking around'. This is a good way to keep up to date with what is happening and to give all staff an opportunity to air any problems. It can also prevent numerous interruptions throughout the day.

## 6

**FURTHER RESOURCES**

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**Websites****Basic Guide to Conducting Effective Meetings**

[www.mapnp.org/library/misc/mtgmgmnt.htm](http://www.mapnp.org/library/misc/mtgmgmnt.htm)

**Conducting Effective Meetings**

[www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/11.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/11.htm)

**Effective Meetings Resource Centre**

[www.effectivemeetings.com/](http://www.effectivemeetings.com/)

**How to Lead Effective Meetings**

[www.ohrd.wisc.edu/academicleadershipsupport/howto1.htm](http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/academicleadershipsupport/howto1.htm)

**Meeting Wizard**

[www.meetingwizard.org/meetings/effective-meetings.cfm](http://www.meetingwizard.org/meetings/effective-meetings.cfm)

**Books****Better Meetings**

Publisher: The Open University

ISBN: 0749243368

**Conducting Effective Meetings – Strategies, Tactics for Successful Meetings**

Gerald L. Pepper

Publisher: BrownHerron

ISBN: B00005RYZT

**The Easy Step by Step Guide to Fewer, Shorter, Better Meetings:****How to Make Meetings More Effective**

Brian Lomas

Publisher: Rowmark Ltd

ISBN: 0953985687

**Leading Effective Meetings: Participant's Guide Package**

J. William Pfeiffer

Publisher: Pfeiffer Wiley

ISBN: 0883904624

**The Manager's Guide to Effective Meetings**

Barbara J. Streibel

Publisher: McGraw-Hill Trade

ISBN: 0071391347