Running An Effective Meeting

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How to Conduct Effective Meetings

A meeting is a means by which information is communicated to, from, or among a group of people. Every well-rounded employee relations program must include upward and downward communication channels for the expression of opinions, the asking of questions, and the exchanging of ideas. Although it is time lost from productive work, carefully planned and properly conducted meetings can achieve many worthwhile objectives.

Why Meetings are Important

We are a meeting society – a world made up of small groups that come together to share information, plan, solve problems, criticize or praise, make new decisions or find out what went wrong with old ones.

Taking a conservative estimate of four hours of meetings a week, you will sit through more than 9,000 hours of meetings in your lifetime – that's over 365 days!

Do you have any idea how many meetings are held every day in the United States alone? More than 11 million!

As you know, the more successful you become in your organization, the more time you spend in meetings. So if you are in middle management, you probably spend about 35 percent of your working week in meetings; if you are in top management, that figure may grow to more than 50 percent of your workweek. That means you may spend over half of the rest of your organizational life attending or conducting meetings.

Meetings are Expensive

If you like to think in terms of dollars and cents, you can compute how much money your organization spends on meetings. While the figures vary from one kind of organization to another, most organizations spend between 7 percent and 15 percent of their personnel budgets directly on meetings. So if your organization has a personnel budget of $100,000 approximately $7,000 to $15,000 of it is spent on people sitting in meetings. This does not include time spent preparing for meetings or attending training programs and conferences.

Time spent attending a meeting is time taken away from all the other things you might like to be doing. Your time is one of your most valuable resources, and naturally you want to spend it wisely.

So Why Do We Still Have Meetings?

You are obviously concerned about the inefficient meetings that waste both your time and your company's money. If they're conducted properly, meetings can and will make you (and your organization) function more efficiently. So the next time you're asked about why you bother holding meetings, think of all the time and money-wasting activities that could be minimized or eliminated with a meeting.

Phone Tag – Voice mail has made this a familiar game for most of us. We all know how frustrating it is to call someone, leave a message, move away from your desk momentarily, and return to find a
message from that person. Phone tag can last for several rounds, leaving both players immensely frustrated. If you're trying to reach someone, it can save time and headaches to simply schedule a quick in-person or audio meeting at a time appropriate for both of you.

**E-mail Antics** – Love it or hate it, we've all come to rely on e-mail for the majority of our communications. How many times have you found yourself e-mailing a question out of sheer habit to someone working 10 feet away? Obviously, e-mail is invaluable when you're communicating over long distances, or if you need to send information to more than one person, or if you need a request in writing. But there are plenty of other situations in which we use e-mail when a face-to-face meeting would be much more effective.

Have you ever spent 15 minutes writing an e-mail on a topic that would have taken you two minutes to discuss in person? Or sent an e-mail on an urgent issue and stared impatiently at your monitor waiting for a response? In these instances, wouldn't it be quicker and easier to schedule a meeting to discuss the issue? That way you can clarify any murky points, receive instant feedback, and engage all relevant parties at once.

Generally, e-mails will summarize issues rather than discuss them in depth. In many instances, a summary is all that's required, but if you need to discuss an issue in depth, a meeting is usually the best alternative.

Because e-mails are written, it can be hard to pick up on the intended tone. Without vocal intonations and physical gestures, the underlying meaning of a message can be lost or misinterpreted. And while many people use e-mail "emoticons" to compensate, they're not really a substitute for the real thing. If you are discussing a sensitive issue, it's always better to do so face to face.

**The Paper Trail** – We've all heard the myth of the "paperless office," but looking at the mountain of paper that's engulfing your workspace, how many of us actually believe it? In fact, studies have shown that the volume of paper produced by businesses has increased rather than diminished in recent years.

Have you ever written a memo or report, then printed off 10 copies to give to your colleagues for feedback? You end up with 10 edited copies that you have to try and integrate into one cohesive document. Wouldn't it save everyone time (and paper) if you called a meeting with your team, collaborated with the live document, and made your changes then and there?

**Remember**… It's important to keep in mind that calling a meeting doesn't always have to be a major production. Keep it brief, focus on the issue at hand, and concentrate on reaching a workable conclusion. Remember, scheduling a 15-minute meeting can be a lot more effective than three e-mails, two missed phone calls, and a paper report!

**Advantages of Manager/Employee Staff Meetings**

The perceptive, conscientious manager will find that time spent in a meeting with employees is not a luxury – it is a necessity:

- It helps to develop a healthy working climate, as well as wholesome on-the-job attitudes and improved morale.
• It helps develop better solutions to supervisory problems, since the total experience and ideas of the group can be brought to bear.

• Total group involvement creates a cohesive "team" in place of an unstructured "pack."

• The manager can use these meetings to plan the department's work more effectively. People who are a part of the decision-making process will be more concerned about achieving the goals and objectives.

• It can help you identify people with leadership ability who can be candidates for future promotion.

• An opportunity is provided for the dissemination of information and ideas, so that all employees will feel that they are "in on the know."

• It provides a forum for feedback in the form of constructive criticism or ideas that can result in a new or better way to accomplish the group objectives.

**Reasons for Meetings**

There is no firm answer to the question: *When should I hold a meeting?*

A rule of thumb is this: hold a meeting when you have something to say that your employees will want or need to hear – whenever the group has something that you want or need to know more about – when you and the group have something you want or need to say to each other.

In broad terms, there are three purposes for having a meeting and the down-up/up-down direction of communication applies in each case. They are: **Information**, to undertake **Problem-Solving** and undertake **Training**.

• **Information** – This would include new or changed policies, procedures, and conditions that affect the daily on-the-job activities of employees.

Employees who are not kept informed by their superiors will get answers to the questions about their jobs from other sources. Such sources may not be reliable and the information employees get may not be consistent with the facts. Nevertheless, if management does not provide information as to "what's going on," employees have no alternative but to seek it from other sources.

Informational meetings have the very real advantage of providing instant feedback from participants to the leader. Feedback can range from "body language" response, like facial expressions, to verbal questions or comments. By the attendee reactions, the leader can accurately evaluate the degree of acceptance of the information.

• **Problem Solving** – The truism *two heads are better than one* is directly applicable to operational problems. The supervisor who seeks the active assistance and participation of subordinates is telling them, *I can't go it alone; to achieve our goals requires the total of all our experience, skills, and ingenuity.* The problem is set forth, alternative solutions are proposed and discussed,
and a plan of action is decided upon. The supervisor has not abdicated responsibility, rather there has been a demonstration of leadership and a willingness to recognize the contribution that can be made by others.

- **Training** – The communication of know-how to a group can be the best way to be sure that everyone is "singing off the same sheet of music" – that there is consistency in the way things are being done. The list of training needs is long and different for each organization, but training is an ongoing process that requires constant attention.

**Meeting Tips Summary**

- **Don't Meet.** Avoid a meeting if the same information could be covered in a memo, e-mail or brief report.

- **Set Objectives for the Meeting.** Before planning the agenda, determine the objective of the meeting. The more concrete your objectives, the more focused your agenda will be.

- **Provide an Agenda Beforehand.** Your agenda needs to include a one-sentence description of the meeting objectives, a list of the topics to be covered and a list stating who will address each topic for how long. Follow the agenda closely during the meeting.

- **Assign Meeting Preparation.** Give all participants something to prepare for the meeting, and that meeting will take on a new significance to each group member.

- **Assign Action Items.** Don't finish any discussion in the meeting without deciding how to act on it.

- **Examine Your Meeting Process.** Don't leave the meeting without assessing what took place and making a plan to improve the next meeting.

**Reasons Meetings Fail**

1. Poorly planned – agenda is not clear
2. Poor leadership
3. Setting is not good
4. Too many interruptions
5. They last too long
6. No team building has been done
7. Objectives are not met
8. Group is controlled by others than the leader
9. Decisions are not followed up
10. Inefficient use of technology

**Reasons Meetings Succeed**

1. They are well planned – agenda is known
2. Leadership is in charge
3. Physical setting is good
4. Interruptions are held to a minimum
5. They are held only to a minimum
6. They are held only as long as need to meet the objective
7. There has been good team building
8. Group is open and all share in discussion
9. Decisions are followed up
10. Meetings are planned to take people away from work as little as possible

**Time and Length of Meetings**

The most acceptable time to hold an employee meeting is at the beginning or end of the day. Thus, it is not an interruption – rather it is a time when the desks are clear and work responsibilities are set aside. The end of the day is particularly appropriate if the topic is one that would distract or cause discussion among employees. It gives them a night to sleep on it. The exception is when some urgent news is going to break during the day. Then, your meeting should be the first order of business.

The length of your meeting depends on the topic. Ten minutes may be adequate in many situations. On the other hand, it may require a half-hour to reach the meeting objective.

Here are a few basic rules that may be helpful:

- Don't make the meeting so short that people feel rushed or that a conclusion was not reached or that they did not have an opportunity to express themselves.

- If the meeting is too long because it becomes bogged down in trivia or is monopolized by a few people, the participants will become bored and will lose interest.

- Many of the attendees may be accustomed to moving around and are uncomfortable if they must sit for a long time. There is a great deal of truth in the statement, "The mind will absorb only as much as the seat will stand."

**Arrangements for a Meeting**

Participants must be able to give their undivided attention during a meeting. Otherwise, they will lose interest, become fidgety, or minds will wander. Surroundings and physical comfort cannot be overlooked.

- Adequate light, heat, and ventilation are vital for alertness. Too much or too little will result in discomfort, drowsiness, or just plain inattentiveness.

- Select a place where the people feel "at home." Blue-collar workers may feel uncomfortable in the President's plush office or in a paneled Board room. On the other hand, white-collar types may be uncomfortable in the break room.

- If visual aids are used, the room chosen must afford the audience an unobstructed view and must have sufficient outlets for projectors and other equipment.
- Comfortable, but not too comfortable, seating should be provided. Benches, desktops, and standing room only are a last resort. The truism, *The mind will absorb only as much as the seat will stand* is a law that is violated at great risk.

- Seating arrangements should encourage the group or audience to be together and close to the leader. In a room with fixed seats such as an auditorium, insist that people sit up front and leave no empty seats.

  When using chairs, there is a psychological advantage of having few that are empty. It's better to have extras that can be brought in than to have empty seats – it makes the room seem fuller and forces people to sit on the front row.

- Noise levels and traffic within the meeting area should be kept at a bare minimum. These can cause unwelcome distractions and competition for the audience's attention.

- To use or not to use an audio system? – that is a question that must be answered. Noise levels and the carrying power of the speaker's voice will be the controlling factors. The absence of an audio system creates a more personal, informal atmosphere. On the other hand, people can't absorb what they can't hear. If an audio system is used, before the meeting, be sure that:
  - it works;
  - that the volume is high enough for everyone to hear, but doesn't blast them out of the room; and
  - the leader knows how to use it.

- Send out written notification to each participant, giving the date, time, and place as well as the purpose of the meeting. Remind them to bring along whatever data or material will be needed.

- Have the room ready in advance with any necessary equipment. The leader may want a podium or table. If the room is large, have a turned-on microphone ready. Determine if the leader needs a stand for charts, screen, projector, or other visual-aid props.

- When outsiders are invited, they should be given complete information about the name of the room, location, parking, and other such details.

- If a luncheon or dinner is part of the program, schedule it for a definite time, and make menu plans to fit the group.

- Certain essentials should be provided on the day of the meeting so that it will get under way promptly and proceed properly.
  - Individual tablets and plenty of sharpened pencils should be handy.
  - A pitcher of fresh ice water, with one or more glasses, should be placed at the speaker's or leader's position. Water and possibly paper cups should also be available for the members of the group.
  - Provide "No Smoking" signs where appropriate.
− The location of restrooms should be known.

− Cloak rooms or racks should be handy and indicated.

− Arrival of any guests should be mentioned to the receptionist in order to have her ready to receive guests quickly and impressively.

− An agenda of the meeting should be prepared for the leader and gone over with him/her.

− Any and all supporting information, charts, and exhibits should be ready to share.

**Getting More Out of the Meeting – Effective Meetings Don’t Just Happen**

A meeting can be all things to all managers – effective and productive – or just "wheel spinning". The effectiveness of any meeting (whether it's a weekly meeting or supervisors or a long-range planning session involving the entire management staff) is determined by the individual sitting at the head of the table. The leader needs to adequately prepare so as to maximize the effectiveness of the session. Areas to be considered are:

- Meetings must not be approached casually with only a vague notion of objectives.

- The leader should not discourage creativity and open speculation. Meetings are designed to solve problems, develop strategies, and help make decisions. Consequently, they require creativity from participants.

- In almost all meetings, there is a high level of antagonism toward new ideas. Careful planning should be exercised to present ideas in their best possible "light."

**How to Create an Agenda**

Creating an effective agenda is one of the most important elements for a productive meeting. Here are some reasons why the meeting agenda is so important.

**The Agenda**

- communicates important information such as:
  - topics for discussion
  - presenter or discussion leader for each topic
  - time allotment for each topic

- provides an outline for the meeting (how long to spend on which topics)

- can be used as a checklist to ensure that all information is covered

- lets participants know what will be discussed if it's distributed before the meeting. This gives them an opportunity to come to the meeting prepared for the upcoming discussions or decisions.
• provides a focus for the meeting (the objective of the meeting must be clearly stated in the agenda)

**How to Create an Effective Agenda**

You're responsible for planning your project meeting this month. Arrggh!! What to do? Now you understand how important an agenda is to the effectiveness of the meeting, but don't know how to create one. Breathe easy! All you have to do is follow the steps outlined below.

1. Send an e-mail stating there will be a meeting, the goal of the meeting as well as the administrative details such as when and where it will be. Ask those invited to accept or decline the meeting. Make it clear that once they have accepted the meeting, they are expected to attend.

2. Ask participants requesting an agenda item to contact you no less than two days before the meeting with their request and the amount of time they will need to present it.

3. Once all of the agenda requests have been submitted to you, summarize them in a table format with the headings Agenda Item, Presenter and Time. It's your responsibility to ensure that each agenda item is directly related to the goals of this particular meeting. If an inappropriate request is made, suggest that person send an e-mail or memo instead or recommend that this agenda item be discussed in another meeting. Also, you must be realistic in the amount of time you allocate to each presenter. Don't cram an unrealistic number of agenda items into an hour meeting. When people accept an hour meeting, they expect to be finished in an hour. When meetings go over time, people generally tend to get uneasy. It's better to schedule 50 minutes of discussion into an hour time slot. This way you have 10 minutes to spare and if you get done a little early, people will be pleased.

4. Send the agenda to all the meeting participants the day before the meeting with a reminder of the meeting goals, location, time and duration. At this time, ask the presenters if they are happy with the order in which they will be speaking and the amount of time they have been allocated.

5. Of course, the most important part of creating an effective agenda is to follow it during the meeting!

**Meeting Startup**

The most helpful way to start a meeting or offsite is to clearly explain the Outcomes, Agenda, Roles and Rules (OARRs). This Guide provides an easy way to show your OARRs. By using this Guide to launch a meeting, you will save both time and effort.

**10+ Tips for Starting (and Finishing) Your Meetings on Time**

Your meetings often start late and run over time, but it doesn't have to be this way. It's time to take your meetings more seriously! Whether you're the meeting organizer or the attendee, commit to starting and finishing your meetings on time. Expect attendees to be punctual and the meeting to finish on schedule. Intolerance for tardiness will set a behavioral standard for the group, and
participants will likely conform if expectations are well defined and consistently enforced. Listed below are some tips to help you and your group stay on time.

If You're the Meeting Organizer:

- State that the meeting will begin promptly at the scheduled time and that all participants should be on time
- Send a reminder e-mail thirty minutes before the meeting begins and encourage meeting participants to arrive on time
- Ensure that you begin the meeting at the scheduled time. If you've encouraged others to be prompt, don't embarrass yourself by showing up late.
- Close the meeting room doors at the scheduled time. There's nothing like late attendees to disrupt the flow of a meeting! Consider posting a note outside the door stating the meeting's time. This may seem harsh, but it clearly communicates how serious you are about keeping your meetings on time. If the tardy participants don't consider your meeting important enough to arrive on time, perhaps they shouldn't have committed to attend at all.
- If your meeting starts a little late, you should still finish the meeting at the scheduled time. It's inconsiderate to assume the participants' schedules revolve around your meeting, so wrap up the meeting when you promised.
- Consider creating a "latecomer jar" to which meeting participants must contribute one dollar for each minute they arrive late to meetings. At the end of the week, you can buy muffins or donuts for everyone who attended the meeting… courtesy of the latecomers!

If You're the Attendee:

- Quickly review the agenda before heading to the meeting. It's a good idea to remind yourself why you're attending the meeting. Reviewing the agenda helps attendees be better prepared for the meeting and, in turn, will help focus the meeting, enable all of the agenda items to be covered and allow the meeting to finish on time!
- Make your way to the meeting ten minutes before it actually begins. This will give you enough time to visit the washroom, pour a cup of coffee or deal with any issues that may come up along the way. Plus, you'll get the best seat for the meeting!
- Consider speaking up if the meeting organizer shows up late. There are several ways to do this tactfully without insulting anyone. For example, if the organizer consistently arrives ten minutes late to your weekly meetings, ask him if it would be more convenient to start 15 minutes later next week.
- Try to ask only relevant questions during the meeting. If your comment isn't directly related to the topic at hand, don't mention it. Getting off track is one of the main reasons that meetings go over time. If your group can avoid getting off track, you'll all spend less time in meetings.
• Leave the meeting when it was scheduled to end. When the organizer extended the invitation to meet, he stated when the meeting would finish. It was on this condition that you accepted the meeting and committed your time. If you have work to which you must attend, politely tell the organizer that you have to leave and excuse yourself from the meeting.

By acting on these ideas, you can indicate how important punctual meetings are. You may even influence others whose meetings frequently run over time.

Quick Tips for Leading Your Next Meeting

Need a few quick tips for leading your next meeting? Check out the tips below!

1. **Be Very Clear on the Purpose of the Meeting**

Before your meeting, set goals and decide upon the specific objective for the upcoming meeting. Identify the desired outcome for each agenda item to be discussed. Doing this will clarify what needs to be accomplished during the meeting.

2. **Begin Small Meetings with Introductions**

First introduce yourself and thank people for coming to the meeting. Review the proposed agenda for the attendees. Briefly explain each item, so people understand what the agenda topics mean and point out the time limit. Ask if there are any questions. Doing this provides structure to the meeting and communicates to the attendees that the meeting has a schedule and a defined set of goals that must be accomplished.

3. **Involve As Many People as Possible During the Meeting**

Ask silent people for their opinions, call on a variety of people, and don't allow nonstop talkers to monopolize the discussion – everyone will appreciate it. Having a variety of people contributing not only creates an interesting discussion but also promotes a more in-depth discussion. The more perspectives that are involved, the better your group's decisions. Making an effort to involve all participants also moves people from a passive to an active role.

4. **Make Sure Everyone Understands What's Going On**

Throughout the discussion, it's a good idea to clarify and summarize what's happening. This shows consideration for all of your meeting participants and helps maintain focus during the meeting.

5. **Remember That Time Is Important**

Disorganized and unexpectedly long meetings can demoralize people. Try to put time limits on each agenda item and select a timekeeper. Keep the meeting moving and adhere to the schedule dictated by the agenda. Otherwise, your meeting will go overtime and the attendees will become frustrated.

6. **Assign Action Items**

When action items arise from the meeting discussion, assign them immediately. Select an individual, a priority level and a due date for the action item. This way, no items will be forgotten or left
unassigned. You'll likely get some volunteers to help fulfill any remaining action items. Naturally, everyone wants to be helpful and cooperative in front of his or her peers!

7. **End the Meeting with a Summary of Decisions and Assignments**

Take five minutes to review the outcome of each agenda item, as well as the action items list. Doing this ends the meeting on a note of accomplishment and also reminds the attendees who's responsible for what after the meeting adjourns. It's also a good idea to review the meeting process. Ask the group what went well during the meeting and which areas need improvement. Take note of the comments and try to improve on them the next time you lead your group's meeting.

**Meeting Productivity Enhancers and Inhibitors**

These days, there are many meeting room and personal productivity tools available. Used correctly, these tools can increase your productivity in the meeting room. But when not used wisely, they can turn against you. Review this list to see whether or not you've been using your tools to enhance or inhibit your productivity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enhancer</th>
<th>Inhibitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling a meeting using Outlook or a similar scheduling tool</td>
<td>Neglecting to use the feature in the scheduling tool that lets you check availability of participants prior to sending the meeting request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing your presentation in PowerPoint to make edits quickly and be able to reuse it whenever necessary</td>
<td>Trying to impress people with your knowledge of PowerPoint and ending up distracting them from your message through the use of too much animation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it's your turn to take meeting notes, capturing the gist of the meeting on an interactive whiteboard</td>
<td>When it's your turn to take meeting notes, capturing what you think should have been said rather than what was actually agreed upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using your PDA to quickly check your availability for the next meeting</td>
<td>Using your PDA to take notes and making everyone wait while you play the &quot;I've almost got it...&quot; game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using your notebook to jot down personal notes in the meeting</td>
<td>Using your notebook to jot down your grocery list and favorite doodles in the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting your laptop to the network to capture notes directly or review relevant meeting material</td>
<td>Connecting your laptop to the network to read your e-mail during the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a projector to display information so that everyone in the room can follow</td>
<td>Using a projector and standing in front of the beam so that you look like you have a tattoo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact of the matter is that any tool can help or hinder, depending on where and how you use it. The trick is to learn how the tool adds to your personal productivity, then apply it in that way. Here are a few tips for using some common tools more productively.
• Spend a few minutes looking at the tutorials in the software you use most often. Chances are you're using only 10% of its features. The 80/20 rule definitely applies here – is there one more feature that, if you learn to use correctly, would pay off in productivity gains?

• If you truly want to be more productive during your work hours, time yourself performing each activity. You can either keep an alarm clock on your desk or use your computer clock. Assign a certain amount of time to accomplish a task, then set the alarm to beep when you should be finished. This will allow you to do three things: learn how long tasks actually take (so you can better determine whether they are a valuable use of your time), become better at estimating your actual deliverables, and take a stretch or water break at regular intervals.

• A great book about working smarter so that you don't have to work harder (among other things) is *Simplify Your Work Life: 100 Ways to Change the Way You Work so You Have More Time to Live* by Elaine St. James.

**What Are Some Effective Ways to Lead a Teleconferenced Meeting?**

Below you'll find some tips and techniques for facilitating your next teleconferenced meeting.

**Before the Call**

• Try to plan ahead and let participants know the date, time and expected duration of the meeting. Be sure to provide all printed materials (agenda, background information, etc.) to participants in advance. It’s important that participants come prepared to every meeting, so define what you expect of them and provide some ideas on how they can do this.

Also, with teleconferenced meetings, it's imperative that all attendees arrive on time. Highlight the importance of this when you e-mail the meeting information to them.

**During the Call**

• Always take roll call first. This lets everyone know exactly who's in the room. If some of the meeting participants haven't met previously, take some time to let each participant introduce himself and explain why he is attending the meeting.

Next, outline the agenda and highlight the objective of this meeting. It's probably a good idea to define the meeting ground rules and expected behavior during the meeting. For example, ask participants to speak naturally, identify themselves when speaking, pause for others to comment and to spell out unusual terms, names and numbers. Basically, you should explain the importance of communicating as clearly as possible to avoid confusion.

During the meeting, try to direct questions and comments to specific individuals or locations. This way you can avoid having several people talking at once. At the end of your meeting, choose a date and time for your next teleconference call, if necessary. If you're going to have another meeting, assign action items or follow-up tasks for the participants.
How to Make an Effective Group Presentation

• What to do:
  − Be in the meeting room early to be sure all room details are ready for you. Also, being in the room first before the audience may make you feel more comfortable.
  − Meet personally as many people as possible beforehand.
  − Get right to the point. The first 15 seconds is what grabs the listener. (What not to do: start with "thank you" and "I'm very happy to be here.")
  − Make eye contact with everyone in the audience at some time very early in the presentation.
  − Support main points with factual information and examples.
  − Repeat the main points to be sure the listeners have received them.
  − Look for a creative conclusion. Examples: a provocative thought or action-suggesting statement.

• Questions

Never ask the audience "Any questions?" If there aren't any, the silence will be embarrassing. Instead: Suggest "There may be some questions." It makes a difference.

When receiving long questions (anything longer than ten seconds), paraphrase the question for the audience. That gives everyone a chance to hear, ensures that the speaker understands the question, and provides time to formulate an answer.

• Use of Notes

Limit use because it inhibits spontaneity. What to write out – key words or short phrases to jog thoughts. Good idea – alternate lines with different color ink to facilitate quick focusing on material.

Winning Group Confidence

Winning the confidence of the group as quickly as possible is absolutely necessary. The members must be convinced that you're sincere, candid, and above-board when you speak, and that you have appreciation for their viewpoint and problems. You must be open-minded and not determined to force your own ideas; instead, you should convince them that the real objective is to find out what they know and help them organize their knowledge for effective use.

Maintaining Interest

Once the leader has obtained the confidence of the group, then success depends on maintaining interest.
The leader must identify himself with a subject under consideration. If the participant can just see where the contributions and agreements will tie into or satisfy some personal need or desire, he will naturally be interested. Without interest, there is no real thinking or learning.

Lack of interest is usually evidenced by silence of group members, tendency to talk about everything else rather than the principle topic or kidding, laughing, and joking.

Some ways to hold the group's interest are:

- To discuss "live" topics which are common to the group as a whole.
- To stress that the subject is important by citing relevant cases and problems.
- To keep the meeting "on the beam" by controlling the discussion.

**Explain Reasons for Change**

This helps overcome resistance to new ways of doing things. People are reluctant to accept anything on faith – *Just saying it doesn't make it so.* The more people realize why a new policy, procedure, or concept is better, the more likely they will be to cooperate and accept it.

**Get Group Participation**

Unless they are convinced to the contrary, many people feel that despite the invitation to participate and speak up at meetings, the only smart thing to do is to "look interested without saying anything." To minimize such an attitude, the leader can help himself/herself if he prepares and distributes suggestions on how they can get the most out of the discussion meeting. The hints to participants could include:

- Feel free to speak your mind.
- Come to the meeting with some questions in mind.
- Don't agree with everything that is said unless you understand all the angles involved and do agree.
- If you're not sure of what has been said, ask the leader to illustrate the point by giving additional examples. Your question may be the most helpful in helping to clarify the thinking of others.
- Listen before you question or comment.
- Respect the honest opinion of your fellow participants.
- Don't hesitate to disagree – a friendly argument may help clear up a mistake notion.
- Try not to monopolize the discussion. Have your say and let the other person speak up.
• Use pencil and paper to jot down the points you don't understand, the comments you wish to make, and ideas you want to remember.

The leader can encourage participation by asking what they know about the situation. It should be clear that whatever facts they can give would help. He should ask questions to stimulate discussion.

**Make the Most of Question and Answer Sessions**

• Tell the speaker and audience in advance that there will be a question and answer session after the presentation.

• Allow at least ten minutes for questions.

• Prevent anyone from monopolizing the floor by pointing to three people to ask questions, one after the other.

• Defuse a loaded question by immediately interrupting to correct an inaccurate premise in the question.

• Repeat and paraphrase all questions.

• Stop the questions before they die a natural death.

• Accept the final question while several hands are still raised.

**The Question and Answer Period:** A contest of wills or a meeting of the minds?

The question and answer period can be very productive and rewarding – both to the leader and to the participants. But, it must be controlled and directed.

On one hand, the participants cannot be permitted to take over the meeting. To do so would result in complete chaos with no possibility that the objectives would be achieved.

On the other hand, a free exchange of ideas and the expression of creative thinking must be encouraged. To accomplish the former, without inhibiting the latter, requires a high degree of leadership skill and ability.

**Positive and Negative Roles People Play in Staff Meetings**

As managers and supervisors, we must understand both the positive and negative roles that individuals play in meeting environments.

For example, here are some of the more constructive roles people play as participants in meetings:

• **Active Participant:** He/she might not say a lot, but is always on top of everything that is going on and is ready to contribute when called upon.
• **Truth Seeker:** This person is always trying to get to the bottom on things as quickly as possible to uncover useful information.

• **Questioner:** Raises appropriate questions for group discussion and action.

• **Prodder:** Is always bringing discussions back to the central issues and urging decisions along.

• **Mediator:** Seeks to reconcile hostile factions in the group and to keep harmony.

• **Credit-Giver:** Creates a positive atmosphere by complimenting others on the work they are doing and contributions they are making.

• **Informer:** Stays in touch with proceedings and always has useful input; keeps facts at fingertips for ready use.

Here are a few examples of **negative** group-blocking roles:

• **Aggressor:** Criticizes and deflates status of others; disagrees constantly and aggressively.

• **Blocker:** Stubbornly disagrees; rejects others' views, cites unrelated personal experiences; returns to issues already settled.

• **Withdrawer:** Won't participate; converses privately; self-appointed note taker.

• **Recognition-Seeker:** Brags; talks excessively; conscious of status.

• **Topic-Changer:** Continually changes the subject.

• **Dominator:** Tries to take over, assert authority, and manipulate the group.

• **Special Interest Pleader:** Uses group's time to plead his/her own cause.

• **Clown:** Wastes group's time by showing off, telling stories, and interrupting others.

• **Self-Confessor:** Talks irrelevantly about own feelings and insights.

• **Devil's Advocate:** Cynical and negative about whatever the group decides; more devil than advocate.
# How to Handle "Problem Personalities" in Staff Meetings

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<tr>
<th>Problem Personalities</th>
<th>Recommendations for Leaders</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The know-it-all – the person who wants to impose his opinions on everyone else.</td>
<td>Encourage other members to comment on his remarks freely. Let the rest of the group take care of him. Build up the confidence of the group in themselves so they will not be imposed on by this type of member.</td>
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<td>2. The person who wants to argue. This type is always trying to cross up the leader. He will quibble over the most trivial detail and loves to get the other fellow's &quot;goat.&quot;</td>
<td>The first rule of this type of situation is to keep cool. The leader should not lose his head nor allow others to do so. Use questions. Draw out the individual and turn him over to the group. Keep members from getting personal. Get the opinion of the majority.</td>
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<td>3. The person who thinks you are telling him how to run his job and resents it. This person may feel that he knows his job better than anyone else.</td>
<td>Get him to feel his experience can be valuable to others – that the purpose of the conference is to exchange ideas and pool experience.</td>
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<td>4. The over-talkative individual – the one who wants to do all the talking.</td>
<td>Be very tactful, but interrupt and ask others to comment.</td>
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<td>5. The shy individual.</td>
<td>Call on him by name to give an opinion, but ask him an easy question he is sure to answer well and then praise him. Find something for him to do to help you in the conference. For example, hold-up charts, assist in the demonstration, or make a report.</td>
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<td>6. The obstinate individual – has no time for &quot;school&quot; – doesn't believe in these &quot;new fangled&quot; ideas and delays the progress of the meeting.</td>
<td>Can wreck a conference if not handled properly. In a tactful way, bring the discussion to a close by calling for a vote on the question. Study the individual to determine his likes and dislikes and special interests. Try to win his personal friendship.</td>
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<td>7. The disinterested conferee.</td>
<td>Ask direct questions affecting his work. Ask his advice pertaining to some feature of the meeting. Quote tactfully some statement he has made to you outside the conference. Pick out something in his department and point it up as a good example. Carefully bring up things in which you know he is interested.</td>
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<td>8. The person who attempts to get your opinion instead of giving his.</td>
<td>Refer the question back to the group and then back to him.</td>
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9. The person who carries a personal grudge. Avoid discussion about his pet peeve. Explain that any problem discussed must be for the greatest number and that no personal gripes will be discussed. If the grudge is between two individuals in the group who hold a personal grievance against each other, avoid discussion between them and rescheduled one of them for another time with a different group.

10. The person who is wrong, but whom others in the group, out of respect, refuse to correct. Always avoid direct criticism, sarcasm, and ridicule. Use indirect methods. Analyze a similar case without reference to him personally. Talk to him in private.

Tips for the Attendee – How to Make Participation in Meetings Worthwhile

• Be Prepared

Don't go to a meeting with a blank mind and an empty stare. Do your homework! If the agenda is distributed in advance, study it carefully. If material is given to you for the meeting, read it with understanding. Advance preparation sharpens your participation to the discussions.

• Don't be a Know-It-All

Never try to look good at someone else's expense. Courtesy and consideration for associates is the best method of achieving a meeting of minds. The person who uses a quick tongue and sharp wit to deflate the less articulate or slower-thinking colleague may win arguments and even get plenty of laughs. But, the sympathy of other people is frequently with the victim, and if you ever slip or fall, the human reaction of your colleagues will be, He had it coming.

• Pay Attention

Some people pay attention only to the sound of their own voice. Which someone else has a floor, this kind of person is likely to talk to his neighbor, doodle on a scratch pad, or deliberately look through his papers. If you expect the courtesy of attentive listening when you have something to say, then you should extend the same courtesy to others. If you are fidgety, inattentive, or concerned with matters not related to the subject at hand, you not only shortchange yourself, but distract others.

• Don't Be a Windbag

You make a constructive contribution to a meeting if you raise interesting points. Give enlightening explanations of complex questions or intelligent and objective criticism. Don't hesitate to speak if you have something to say, but quit talking when you have made your points. The person who grabs every opportunity to sound off at meetings may find that his superiors are trying to find ways to keep him from coming.
• **Don't Upstage the Leader**

It's his job to discuss matters of interest to the group and if he needs your assistance, he will ask for it. If you disagree with him, keep it to yourself. You can discuss the matter with him later if you wish. But, at the meeting, he carries the ball and you should work with him. If the leader is your superior and if you plan to say anything controversial, it's a good idea to discuss it with him in advance. The subordinate who brings up something new or surprising is guilty of poor judgment. Also, there is the risk of having the proposal publicly shot down.

• **Keep Good Notes**

Don't rely on memory to tell you what took place at a meeting. Notes are very helpful. Furthermore, the very act of taking notes forces you to concentrate on what's being said and indicates to others that you are interested in their opinions or comments.

• **Don't Be an Angry Debater**

Objective discussion is useful and often leads to the resolution of conflicting points of view. But, don't argue for the sake of argument and avoid nit picking about trivial details. Whatever you do, keep personalities and emotions out of your comments. Controversy can be very disrupting to a conference.