

Running **Effective** Meetings

Meetings are an integral part of our daily lives; meetings with the boss, with customers, with colleagues, school teachers, family members, friends, doctors, mechanics, the city - the list goes on and on. And as much time as we spend 'in' meetings, ample consideration must be given to the planning and running of meetings, especially if you expect them to be effective.

According to an online Microsoft Survey, respondents say that they spend 5.6 hours per week in meetings, yet 71% of them feel that the meetings are NOT productive. To make meeting time, time well-spent, it is important that more focused attention be given to the planning and running process. Below are some tips to help you do just that.

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First, re-evaluate the need for the meeting and ask if having a meeting the only way that the content can be shared or communicated? Or might there be other options? If having a meeting is deemed necessary, consider these details

- Have a well-defined purpose/objective and desired outcome
- Choose an appropriate location and room configuration. If it is an all day meeting give consideration to windows and good lighting. Dark, dungeon-like rooms can easily affect morale. Also be cognizant of participants that will be traveling. Is the location convenient?
- For traveling participants, be sure to collect airport and hotel accommodation options to share either with participants or travel agents.
- When possible send the meeting invite well in advance, clearly sharing the meeting location and time. This will allow participants to plan their attendance and participation, as well as respond to your meeting request in the event that they are out of the office when you send it.
- Communicate the objective and a proposed agenda; doing so allows participants to align their expectations and contributions.
- Share all supporting documentation in a timely manner. If there is homework necessary, give participants ample time to complete, with clear instructions on when it is due. It is a good idea to share this information in the meeting invite when possible.
- Talk with all presenters/speakers prior to the meeting to ensure that the meeting follows its schedule and planned content is understood by both you and the presenter/speaker



- Re-address your invitee list. Is every person on the list needed for the entire meeting or can they instead be invited to a smaller segment of the meeting? Inviting someone to an hour-long meeting when their contribution only consumes two minutes creates the kind of survey results mentioned above – people feel that their valuable time has been wasted.



- Double check with all presenters, if applicable, on their attendance, clarity about their role in the meeting and their presentation topics. Doing so lets presenters know you are organized and diligent about your planning.
- Start on time / End on time. When participants and presenters alike agree to attend a meeting, they are doing so with the time expectations you provide – sticking to them is appreciated by all.
- Don't go longer than 90 minutes without a break.
- Examine technical and technology needs: projector, lapel mic, screen, lighting, extension cords, media table, podium, internet access, speaker phone, recording devices, etc.
- If the meeting is via the web, telephone or video-conferencing – be aware of time zone differences.
- Room supplies – pen, paper, flip charts, markers, name tags, etc
- Address all food and beverage needs in advance – waiting until the last minute will severely disrupt the flow of your meeting.
- Prepare introductions in advance to set the tone for the meeting.
- Recap the agenda, stressing the desired outcomes.
- Set any ground rules as you see fit for meeting participants to understand. These will vary according to the format and style of the meeting.
- Plan for a meeting scribe, should the meeting format call for it. If a meeting scribe is present, ensure the meeting minutes are distributed in a timely manner.
- When appropriate, ask participants to complete a meeting evaluation survey. Always prepare your survey in advance of the meeting for distribution either on site or via electronic response. The feedback received in these types of surveys will be useful for the meetings you plan in the future.



Attending 5.6 hours of meetings per week may seem like a lot to attendees, but for the person preparing for those 5.6 hours of meetings it can seem much longer – if not done effectively. Planning meetings is a challenging task, but with your task list in-hand, you're sure to be a success and will likely have fun in the process!