

As a leader of your organization, you are charged with the task of running your organization's meetings. These meetings give your leadership team and members of the organization the chance to discuss and evaluate objectives, keep updated on current events, provide a chance to communicate, and make important decisions. With proper planning and preparation, any meeting can be effective and enjoyable.

### Five Tips for Running an Effective Meeting

#### **1. Determine the objective of your meeting.**

The first step to success in running an effective meeting is to set your meeting up for success. After you set the date, time, and location of the meeting, you must determine the objective of your meeting. Why are you holding the meeting and what do you plan to accomplish during the meeting? An agenda is a helpful tool that establishes the objective and tone of your meeting. It also functions as a method to organize and keep your meeting running smoothly.

#### **Consider using the POP model as a guide to developing your agenda:**

- **Purpose**: For what purpose(s) is the meeting being held?
- **Outcome**: What do you want the results of the meeting to be? What topics will you address in achieving those results?
- **Plan**: What needs to happen at the meeting for it to meet its purpose and achieve the expected results?

Whether you use a POP model agenda, or perhaps a formal outline, be sure to craft an agenda that best fits your organization; be as formal or informal as you'd like, but be sure to maintain consistency! Remember also to distribute the agenda to members before each meeting. This will give them the opportunity to prepare and make your meeting as productive as possible.

#### **2. Keep up-to-date written records of each meeting.**

It is important to keep a written record of what occurred and was decided in each of your meetings. You or a future member of the organization should be able to look back at the progress and important decisions that were made at a particular point in time.

Assign a member of your organization to take notes during the meeting. He or she can use the meeting agenda as an outline to take those notes. After the meeting, the minutes should be prepared as an official record and should be sent out to each member to recap the meeting.

Here are some topics to include when putting together meeting minutes:

- The date and time of the meeting
- Names of those attending
- Topics discussed
- Points made during the discussion
- Actions taken or decisions made
- Tasks to be performed
- Items to be carried over to the next agenda

#### **3. Engage meeting participants from the start.**

Establish a climate for teamwork during your meetings. It is important that all members are engaged, interested, and willing to participate together to make important decisions for your organization. Here are a few tips to encourage engagement and participation at your meetings.

**Set ground rules.** Let meeting participants collaborate together to set their own rules or community expectations for behavior. When they feel part of the process, they are more likely to follow the rules and make meaningful contributions to the discussion. Sample ground rules may include:

- Be prepared for each meeting
- Give everyone a chance to speak
- Be brief and to the point when speaking
- Respect confidentiality
- No side conversations

For more formalized decision making meetings, you may consider using **Parliamentary Procedure**. Much like the process that the government uses to pass legislation, this is a body of rules that governs the process of decision making during your meeting. This process allows for opinions to be heard and decided upon in an orderly manner. For more information on Parliamentary Procedure, see Robert's Rules of Order: <http://www.robertsrules.com>.

**Encourage group participation.** As a leader and meeting facilitator, do set up a meeting that promotes teamwork and group discussion? Does every member of the group get his or her voice heard? An important part of engaging members during meetings is letting them have a say in the decision making process. Consider switching up your current meeting format to encourage participation through methods such as subgroup or partner discussion, go-arounds, panels, or even games. Create a meeting atmosphere that encourages every member to get involved!

**Take time to reflect and assess your meeting.** At the close of the meeting, take a few moments to reflect on the level engagement and accomplishments of your meeting. Think about holding a brief discussion in which you and the meeting participants reflect on how they worked as a group and on what was achieved.

Consider some of these questions:

- What are you taking away from this meeting? What is the group taking away?
- How did we work together? What was helpful? Not helpful?
- How could we have been more efficient and/or effective today?
- Are you hopeful or are you concerned about the progress we are making?
- What suggestions do you have for our next meeting?
- What is one thing that you are going to commit to the group for our next meeting?

This is a great way to not only celebrate the wins from your meeting, but it helps you to evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting and commitment of your organization's members.

#### 4. Stay focused during the meeting.

Productive and effective meetings are focused meetings. Focused meetings are concise, stay on topic, and accomplish topics as outlined by the meeting agenda. Focused meetings also...

- **Start and end on time.** They respect the time that members are donating to the organization.
- **Keep to the agenda.** For ideas that deviate off topic, create a *PARKING LOT* and consider adding these ideas to the next meeting's agenda.
- **Manage controversy and conflict.** Group tension can be detrimental to the progress of your meeting and organization; however, it can also be healthy if you develop strategies to help your group cope with it and move forward. Examples include:
  - Ask participants to take time to evaluate their assumptions and perceptions of a heated issue.
  - Promote active debate.
  - Ask each side of the argument to present their opinion in a structured fashion. Ask them to answer these questions: What is the conflict we're having? What concerns us? What would we like to suggest to the group? What are we willing to do about it?

#### 5. Keep it creative!

A general consensus on meetings is that they can be long and boring; however, meetings are an essential component in planning for success and making important decisions for your organization. Combat the typical notion of meetings by having some fun and being creative!

Some creative suggestions include:

- Instead of getting right down to business, **start your meetings out with a fun icebreaker or activity** that will bring up the energy in the room.
- **Hold your meeting at a different location.** Is the meeting less formal? Instead of holding it in a conference room on campus, consider going to a restaurant or hold it in conjunction with a fun event.
- **Change up the format of your meeting.** Could you hold a Skype meeting? Could a different leader be "in charge" every meeting?

**Reference:** Silberman, M. (1999). 101 ways to make meetings active. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

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