



[DR. SHIRLEY SAYS...]

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Meeting management: Guidelines for success

Are bad meetings driving you crazy? Is your usual lament, “not another meeting”? Certainly, meetings can be a waste of time, yet they can also be extremely productive. According to experts, most professionals will spend several hours a week in meetings, and some several hours a day.

In today’s business world, meetings have become essential to dealing effectively with issues, crises and daily operations. These meetings can be the key to ongoing communication, gaining consensus and making decisions.

So, are you faced with the task of leading meetings? Are you looking for ways to increase the productivity of your meetings and get more done? Well, this article provides some useful guidelines for sound meeting management. You can enhance your skills by focusing on three essential elements.

Prepare for the meeting

One key to a well-run meeting is good preparation. F. John Reh of About Inc. suggests using the “PAT” approach to meetings — purpose, agenda, timeframe. Reh indicates that the leader should be able to define the purpose of the meeting. That way everyone knows why they are there, what needs to be done, and how to know if they are successful.

Be sure to set an agenda. A well-prepared and organized agenda is an important tool for helping groups hold orderly, efficient meetings. In addition, a carefully planned agenda goes a long way in influencing the outcome of a meeting. Some essentials to developing an effective agenda are:

- Determine the level of attention appropriate for each agenda item. Questions to consider might be: Will an announcement be sufficient? Will discussion be in order? Will a vote be required?

- Carefully consider the order of topics on the agenda. List those items that require immediate attention first, in case time runs short. I also recommend adding a time duration for each item. This helps avoid overly long discussions, and keeps the meeting on track as well as the attention of the participants.

- As appropriate, indicate on the agenda which group member is responsible for each agenda item.

The final aspect of the PAT approach is to set a timeframe. Establish a start and end time for the meeting. A key element for facilitating an effective meeting is starting on time. If there are some extenuating circumstances, wait no longer than five minutes for latecomers. Be wary, when a group member arrives late, of going back and reviewing what has already been covered. That just wastes the time of the people who showed up on time for the meeting.

Lead the meeting

A meeting must be led. The chair should move the meeting along to a successful conclusion, make certain all items on the agenda are addressed, and maintain order. The chair should also set the tone of the meeting. This tone helps maintain order and respect for the process. Some essentials a chair should keep in mind are:

- Be well briefed on all issues.
- Project a sense of order and dig-

nity while remaining calm and impartial. Name-calling, personal attacks and overall rude behavior should not be tolerated.

- Make certain, as necessary, that the meeting follows any legal requirements.

- Ensure that the meeting is fair, objective, and that everyone has a reasonable opportunity to be heard without dominating the meeting.

Record and distribute minutes

Someone should be designated to take minutes of the meeting. How detailed these are depends on the nature of what is being discussed and the skill of the available note taker. The agenda can be used by the note taker as an outline. The minutes should record who attended, what was discussed, any agreements that were reached, and any action items that were assigned.

Soon after the meeting, usually within 24-72 hours, the minutes should be distributed to all who attended, anyone who did not attend, and anyone else affected by the discussions. Whenever possible, e-mail is a great vehicle for distributing the minutes.

Running meetings takes practice and patience. Hopefully, the guidelines in this article get you started, or at least serve as positive reinforcement. Here’s wishing that any previous groans of frustration turn into smiles of accomplishment combined with the comment, “That was a great meeting!”

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