

Running Effective Meetings

Do you dread attending meetings because they are dull, unproductive, disorganized and endless? Don't worry; with proper planning and preparation, any meeting can be effective and fun.

Meetings have several functions. They give members a chance to discuss goals and objectives, and keep updated on current events. They provide a chance to communicate and keep the group cohesive. But most of all, meetings allow groups to pull resources together for decision-making. Start with careful planning, finish with a thorough follow-up and the meeting will almost run itself. Here are some tips to make your next meeting successful and productive.

Before the Meeting

- Define the purpose of the meeting. If can't come up with a purpose, don't have a meeting.
- Develop an agenda with the officers and advisers.
- An example agenda:
 - Call to order
 - Approval of agenda
 - Correction and approval of minutes
 - Announcements
 - Officers' reports
 - Committee reports
 - Unfinished business
 - New business
 - Special issues
 - Adjournment
- Distribute the agenda and circulate background material, such as lengthy documents or articles, prior to the meeting so that members will be prepared and feel involved.
- Choose an appropriate meeting time. Set a time limit and stick to it. Remember that members have other commitments. If possible, arrange members so that they face each other. For larger groups, try U-shaped rows. A leader is in better position to communicate when *s/he* is centrally located.
- Chose a location suitable to group size. Small rooms with *too* many people get stuffy and create tension. Larger rooms are more comfortable and encourage individual expression.
- Use visual aids, such as posters, for interest.
- Vary meeting places, if possible, to accommodate different members.

During the Meeting:

- Greet members and help them feel welcome, even the late ones.
- If possible, serve light refreshments, they are good icebreakers. .
- Start on time.
- End on time.
- Review the agenda and set priorities for the meeting. .
- Stick to the agenda.
- Encourage group discussion to get all viewpoints and ideas. You will have better quality discussions as well as more highly motivated members.
- Encourage feedback. Ideas, activities and commitment to the organization improve when members see their impact on the decision-making process.
- Keep conversation on topic, toward an eventual decision.
- Feel free to ask for only constructive comments. Delegate responsibilities and establish due dates.
- Give members a voice in decision-making. Keep minutes of the meeting for future reference in case a question or problem arises.
- Lead, be a model by listening, showing interest, appreciating and having confidence in members.
- Admit your mistakes.
- Summarize agreements reached and end the meeting on a unifying or positive note. For example, have members volunteer thoughts of things they feel are good or successful, reciting a group's creed, or an inspirational thought.
- Set a date and time for the next meeting.
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After the Meeting:

- Prepare and distribute minutes within 24 hours. Quick action reinforces importance of meeting and reduces error of memory.
- Discuss problems during the meeting with officers so that improvements can be made.
- Follow-up on delegation decisions.
- See that all members understand and carry out their responsibilities.
- Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress. .
- Place unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Conduct a periodic evaluation of the meetings. Weak areas can be analyzed and improved for meetings that are more productive.

Five Steps to Effective Delegation

1. Identify the key task – The first critical step is to recognize and track all the main tasks that the members of your group must accomplish. Develop a task list for your group. Define the task and establish your goals for a project. Have a vision to carry through a project.
2. Delegate each task appropriately – Review the list in order to identify the tasks that you should do and those that can be delegated to the members of your group. Choose members whose skills and personality styles match the assignment. Empower members to provide them an opportunity to grow and be challenged.
3. Explain each task to your members – Define and clarify the nature of task that is delegated to your members. To ensure a collaborative approach, do properly communicate to all the members of your group as to what tasks and to whom it has been delegated. Be sure to give specific directions and to make your expectations clear, for both quality and time frame. Explain to the members clearly as to why the task is important and how it contributes to the organization as a whole.
4. Develop a plan for each task assigned – A sound plan is essential for the projects to succeed. Good planning is a critical part of the delegation process. The plan should define how the task will be accomplished; list the subtasks, and their completion dates. Make sure your members have all the necessary resources to complete the assigned task. Encourage your members to take a lead in developing the plan.
5. Monitor the progress – Review the progress of each task on a regular basis. Set checkpoints for both short-range and long-range projects. Give members the freedom to perform and avoid close supervision. Measure the success by quantifiable criteria. Give praise and constructive criticism where it is due. Try not to point the finger and look at a failed act of delegation as a learning opportunity. Help your members to learn and grow through both their Successes and failures.