

EFFECTIVELY MANAGE MEETINGS IN 10 EASY STEPS

Meetings dominate the way in which we do business today. Although many of us complain about meetings, we can all expect to spend our careers deeply immersed in them. Most professionals in the UK attend over 60 meetings a month and research indicates that over 50% of this meeting time is wasted. Assuming each of these meetings is one hour long, professionals lose 31 hours per month in unproductive meetings. Considering these statistics, it's no surprise that meetings have such a bad reputation.

How are unproductive meetings affecting us?

Some direct effects of unproductive meetings include:

- Meetings are longer, less efficient and generate fewer results
- More meetings are needed to accomplish objectives
- With so much time spent in ineffective meetings, employees have less time to get their own work done
- Ineffective meetings cause frustration at all staff levels
- Information generated in unproductive meetings usually isn't managed properly
- Inefficient meetings cost organisations millions of pounds each year in otherwise productive employee work time.

So, how can we make our meetings work for us?

If you're the one calling the meeting, you have a responsibility to those attending to make it a useful and relevant use of their time. The following top ten tips will help transform your meetings from frustrating time-wasters into focussed and effective management tools.

1. Ask the obvious question!

Before you send out the invites, ask yourself if the meeting is actually needed. Is this the best way to achieve your objectives? If it's a recurring meeting, make sure you review it from time to time. Is it still needed? If it is, do you need to refresh the format and style?

2. Prepare, prepare, prepare...

For any meeting to be successful there needs to be some robust preparation beforehand. As meeting leader, you need to be clear about the purpose and objectives of the meeting. What do you want to achieve? What sort of meeting is this – decision making? Generating ideas? Strategy and planning? You also need to make sure you deal with both the practical elements – producing the agenda, booking the right venue, sending out



invitations etc as well as considering the 'people' aspects – who needs to attend? Do they need to attend the whole meeting? What are their expectations?

3. Help your attendees to prepare

All meetings must have an agenda which includes topics for discussion, the presenter or discussion leader for each topic and time allotment for each topic. This is your foundation for using your time efficiently and also provides a 'roadmap' for your attendees. Send the agenda out in advance, so your attendees can comment or suggest changes where relevant. This should be accompanied with any pre-reading that will save time in the meeting. Groups that sit while some attendees read documents for the first time are an inefficient use of time.

4. Start your meeting on time

Even if all the attendees haven't arrived, begin when you said you would. Adhering to the schedule sends out a message that you're serious about the meeting and expect attendees to arrive on time. This should also be the case if you have coffee breaks during long meetings. The majority of your attendees won't thank you if they're waiting for others to return from an 'urgent' phone call they've taken during the break. By also finishing on time, you will reduce the chance of attendees needing to leave before the end or being distracted as they think about another meeting they're now late for.

5. Set the scene

Provide an overview of the meeting purpose and agenda items. This provides direction for the meeting and reinforces what needs to be accomplished during this time. Introduce each agenda item by mentioning who will speak next and what will be discussed. If you have recurring team meetings, you may want to delegate this job to a different team member each meeting. This will help them to have more ownership of the meeting and encourage a more proactive approach.

6. Ensure the meeting is recorded

As the meeting leader, you're responsible for making sure the key actions and decisions are recorded. If it is not going to be you who does it, you need to ensure you identify someone to take the meeting notes (bear in mind, the person recording the meeting won't be able to play such a full part within the discussion). Use action based minutes, which focus on who's taking away which action, rather than recording all the details of the discussions. This will help to maintain a clear focus on what needs to happen following the meeting.



7. Keep the meeting on track

This means steering the meeting discussion in a way that fulfils the meeting objectives. Keep the discussion constructive – if you have difficult personalities in the room or opposing views, this can be challenging! Try using sentences such as, *"That's a valid point, but doesn't directly apply to this discussion. Perhaps we should schedule a separate meeting to address it fully."* Or, *"It's obvious there are some opposing views surrounding this issue. Perhaps our time would be best spent working towards a compromise. Any suggestions?"*

8. Focus on the people as well as the task

Make sure you're paying attention to how the group are interacting as well as how well the content is being covered. Check that the attendees all feel they have an opportunity to input, and identify and address any potential tensions or conflict issues arising. Use listening skills to make sure everyone attending feels 'heard' and to pick up on any signs that attendees are not engaged. If you feel there are underlying issues, address this directly using questions, such as "I'm getting the sense that not everyone is comfortable with this decision. What are the main concerns here?"

9. Maintain interest and keep everyone involved

If your attendees' interest or energy levels are flagging, you may need to vary your approach. Sometimes it's just a break that's needed. It's surprising how even a 2 minute comfort break can help re-energise a room. Sometimes you need to inject some energy by using an activity or group process to help – such as using brainstorming to generate some new ideas. If it's a large group, you may want to split them into smaller groups to consider some key questions. This helps change the dynamic of the room and encourage more involvement.

10. Summarise and review

At the end of the meeting, summarise any decisions made and review the action items by restating who's responsible and by when. This way, everyone has a clear picture of who's responsible for what when the meeting's over. Another item that should be addressed at the end of your meeting is the meeting process itself. Take a few moments at the end of the meeting to discuss what the group did well during the meeting and which areas need improving so you can improve for next time.

For a more 'hands on' experience and role play training for managing your meetings more effectively, call me now to discuss your needs. Tel: 0845 519 2474 Mob: 07879 072337 Email: info@julieblunt.co.uk.