

Facilitating Business Results

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How to Run Effective Meetings

No one in business can live without meetings. But why do so many people groan at the thought of them. Why do most meetings not work?

Have you ever heard these said about meetings:

"I'll be there in a couple of minutes"

"I had another meeting that ran late. Sorry."

"Did we decide who was responsible for that in the last meeting?"

"Just text me. I am in a meeting."

"Got to go to another meeting. I will email you my input."

Meetings are the bane of business today – mainly because they are so unproductive. No agenda, no structure, low energy and many more problems plague the typical business meeting. So what can be done to turn these necessary events into a good use of everyone's time?

Here are three proven methods to increase your meeting productivity.

1. Prepublish an agenda

Send out an agenda to all meeting participants with the meeting name, start and stop times, the meeting leader and directions to the meeting room if necessary. On your agenda, for each item you need to have three parts; start time, action and the owner of that action. The key here is the start time for each item, not the length for each item. The reason for this is that when a meeting starts to run late on an item, everyone starts doing mental gymnastics to work out how the other items will be shifted. By having a start time, you know at what time each item will start. This keeps the meeting on time and makes it easier for the participants to stay on track.

Time control is always a problem with meetings. By pre publishing an agenda, participants have time to think about what they want to achieve in the meeting and to be prepared. The leader or meeting facilitator needs to set the expectation that meetings



will be kept on track. Google's meetings are famous for having a 4-foot image of a ticking stopwatch in their meetings!

2. Publish Meeting Minutes

The main purpose of the minutes is to capture the actions, who will take them and by when. Assign a note-taker. It's essential that outcomes are accurately recorded and checked with each owner of the item. These actions and timelines should be sent out to all participants after the meeting – even those who did not attend. For important meetings, a transcription of the meeting can be taken and added to the official set of notes.

When you receive the minutes - within 24 hours of the meeting - check them immediately to see if any mistakes or inaccuracies have been made. Once it has gone into the official meeting minutes, this becomes the reality.

Avoid the Dilbert cartoon meeting where after a "productive four hour leadership meeting", the leader asks one of the participants to send out their notes. The reply was "I didn't have a pen"! Capturing and publishing your meeting outcomes also sets the standards that people will be held accountable for their commitments.

3. Start and Stop on Time

Always start exactly on time. Never be late. Never wait for anyone. Even if it's your boss. Meetings are frustrating when they start late, people drift in, the whole meeting stops and the discussion is recapped or even

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started again from the beginning. If you want to run effective meetings, you will start them on time. It shows respect for the people who are on time and sends a strong signal for everyone. You can factor in a five minute welcome time so that if people are a couple of minutes late they don't miss the important issues. But when someone comes in late, you ignore them. You don't stop the discussion, or recap the main issues for them. Let them come in, sit down and catch up by themselves. If you use this discipline, people will very quickly understand what is expected when they attend your meetings.

Keeping a meeting on track can be challenging, especially if you don't have a history of sticking to the agenda. Assign a meeting facilitator, and when the item is almost complete let the other person know,

"You've got two minutes."

"John, you've got one more minute"

"Sorry, John, but we have to move on."

Remember that you need to keep a healthy sense of humour here – rather than being a time enforcer. Use the time countdown as a friendly reminder to the discussion. There are 10 keys to effective meetings, and today we have covered three of them: pre-publish an agenda, publish meeting minutes, and start and stop on time.

Warwick John Fahy is Asia's leading communication coach. He runs an interactive engaging workshop "The 10 Keys to Effective Meetings"

for multinationals who need to get more done through team meetings. Download a one page introduction to this event at www.warwickjohnfahy.com

