

# How to Lead a Good Meeting from Beginning to End

## Meeting Preparation, Facilitation and Follow up

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Why do we have meetings?

What purpose do they serve?

How often should we have meetings?

### Before the Meeting

A large part of what makes a meeting successful occurs in the preparation phase. Be sure to do the following before your meeting occurs:

- **Be clear on purpose and desired outcomes.**  
Limit your meeting objectives to a manageable amount. Don't have a meeting to just have a meeting!
- **Create an agenda.**  
An agenda is a framework that guides and supports your meeting. Agendas are like roadmaps, blueprints, flight plans, and recipes. An agenda helps focus the group's work toward achieving desired outcomes. Good agenda items provide focus and structure for a meeting. Be sure to ask your committee members if they have any agenda items. When drafting your agenda include action words like decide, discuss and select in order to outline your meeting objectives.
- **Schedule the meeting at a convenient time and advertise well.**  
Ensure that room arrangements are made and that you have all necessary supplies (such as a flip chart and markers.) Sending a reminder e-mail always helps encourage strong attendance.
- **Ensure that you have someone to take minutes.**  
You must record the outcomes from your meeting in order to follow up on action items. Minutes provide a roadmap for your next meeting and for your overall long-term objectives.

## During the Meeting

The meeting leader can make a huge difference in a group's productivity. Do the following to ensure a worthwhile meeting- for everyone.

- **Start meeting on time and end on time.**
- **Create a friendly meeting environment.**
- **Review agenda and provide a copy for everyone.**
- **Keep discussion focused on agenda items.**  
Meetings don't actually go off-topic, people do. It usually takes at least two people to take the meeting off-course. If you notice that your meeting is off topic try lightly suggesting, "OK, let's come back and focus on the problem we need to solve." If the distraction continues either directly confront those involved, or ask them to leave.
- **Avoid heated discussions.**  
Dominant participants often stifle collaborative problem solving and creativity among participants. But they often have good ideas that deserve consideration. Good leaders need to control the energies of dominant participants so that others have opportunities to contribute.
- **Encourage full participation.**  
Break out sessions (brainstorming) can be some of the best ways to make decisions. It allows everyone to participate and is a good method for "breaking the ice". This group process can be productive because group members can use their collective thinking power to create and build on the ideas.

Some reasons why brainstorming increases the team's ability to generate ideas:

1. Increases involvement and participation.
2. Produces the most ideas in the least amount of time.
3. Reduces the need to give the right answer.
4. Reduces possibilities of negative thinking.

Some basic ground rules:

1. Don't criticize or evaluate ideas.
2. Go for volume. The greater the number of ideas, the greater the possibility of good ones.
3. Encourage participation by asking everyone to contribute an answer.
4. Document the ideas on a flip chart.

- **Schedule and take breaks if necessary.**
- **Help group come to decisions.**
- **Summarize decisions.**
- **Determine point person for each follow-up and assign deadline.**

## **After the Meeting**

- Don't assume that ideas discussed during a meeting will be put into action or even remembered. To ensure follow-through and accountability a meeting leader needs to ensure that minutes are produced and promptly distributed.
- Ensure that the agenda, minutes, and supporting documents are kept together and archived as required.
- Check to ensure that follow up is taking place as agreed.

## ***Resources and References***

3M Meeting Network <http://www.3m.com/meetingnetwork/>

National Association of Parliamentarians <http://www.parliamentarians.org/parlipro.htm>

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