

How To Manage Meetings

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A meeting is an event in which a group of people assemble together with a purpose of discussing some points to make meaningful decisions on management issues. The meeting is managed by a chairperson, who is usually the Boss. This page is meant for those Boss-people who need to manage meetings effectively, but don't know how.

Get the company's telephone operator to make the first announcement of the meeting. Get him to ring up all participants at 7 p.m. to announce that the meeting is scheduled at 9 a.m. the next day. That should give everyone enough time for the following.

- Readjust the next day's schedule accordingly.
- Prepare for the meeting.

Instruct the telephone operator to reveal the agenda only if asked. Tell him the agenda orally, so that he will remember and tell whatever he understands. Even if he does not remember the technical terms, it does not matter. You will tell them all about it anyway, at the right time.

It is a good idea to keep the agenda to yourself. If the participants come to know the agenda only at the time of the meeting, they are encouraged to think more and make fast decisions during the meeting. If they are allowed to think about the agenda for some time in advance, they are likely to think up some things that may prove troublesome for you.

The agenda must not be rigid. It should be so flexible that you can discuss whatever you want, and avoid discussing whatever you don't want.

Never include 'Matters arising out of the minutes of the previous meeting' on the agenda. Then you are obliged to give a follow-up on decisions made at the time of the last meeting. It can be quite embarrassing at times.

Never start a meeting on time. You will appear to be less important if you do, because it will automatically make them think you have nothing better to do. Arrive later than everyone else, so that no one else can appear to be more busy than you. Making them wait for you also is demoralizing for them, and should give you some sadistic pleasure too.

You cannot always arrive late without prior announcement. So tell them you will be late sometimes, and allow the next in command to conduct the meeting until you arrive. Arrive an hour late, and start the meeting all over again. That may bore the participants to death, but it will also reinforce ideas in their minds.

They expect a person of your standing to give them tea/coffee during a meeting. That is OK if the company pays for it. If not, you cannot ask them to go Dutch on it. You have the following options.

- Give tea/coffee every third or fourth meeting.
- Have very small cups, so that one standard cup of tea will be sufficient for three. It will be enough for four if you don't fill the cups to the brims.

- Appear to be in a bad mood, so that they will not dare to expect tea/coffee.
- Scold the peon at the end of the meeting for not giving tea/coffee to the people attending the meeting. Choose a peon who will not say on the spot that you never asked him to get tea/coffee.

Place troublemakers on your left, very close to you. That way you can ignore them without seeming to do so. Place other troublemakers so far away from you that you cannot see them clearly and cannot even hear them. If you can, pretend not to.

Telephone calls during a meeting are quite distracting. Instruct all to keep their mobiles and pagers switched off during the meeting. Keep you table telephone and mobile on anyway, because the rules don't apply to the Boss. The Boss is the rule-maker, not the rule-sufferer. Answer all your calls during a meeting, and speak comfortably, unless it is an unwanted call. Tell unwanted callers to call after the meeting. If they ask when, tell them after a couple of hours. Go away before couple of hours get over.

Friendly atmosphere during a meeting is productive. Be friendly with people who always agree with you, and do what you tell them to do. Frown when the others want to say something. That should teach them to behave better in future, or keep quiet.

You can find yourself in a tight corner sometimes; often if you are not very good at what you do. You have a number of options for getting out of tight corners.

Diversion	Steer the conversation to a topic next to the heart of most, e.g. getting arrears paid.
Counterattack	Attack the weak spot of the attacker.
Confusion	Give an answer like a politician that no one can interpret.
Sanction	Agree to set up a committee to look into the matter.

Schedule surprise meeting after office hours. Then the employees will never think of running away before time, fearing there could be a meeting after they go home. Continue the meeting well beyond dinner time. That way you can convince the directors that you are managing the time of the employees quite well.

Freedom of speech is essential for the success of a meeting. Feel free to talk on whatever topics you want to discuss, no matter what the agenda is. Don't allow the others to do so; they cannot waste everybody else's time royally.

You must be thorough in your work. If any points require clarification, summon the concerned person from wherever he/she may be to explain. Let the meeting be on hold until the person arrives. After all, clarification on the spot is more important than everybody's time, which is being paid for in the form of salary anyway.

If you are a good manager, you will have to arrange a lot of meetings. Time management of so many meetings can be a problem. Do not hesitate to arrange two different meetings at the same time, in two different rooms, or two different parts of

the same room, if it is big enough. In the confusion created, some troublemakers may go away without attending either one. Then you can make decisions more peacefully.

You must behave in a gentlemanly manner while conducting a meeting. Do not harass anyone. After all, your meeting itself should serve as a harassment.

If any issue appears tricky, do not commit yourself in any way. Say it requires legal opinion and send it to the legal department. Chances are that it may not come back with any opinion from that department. If it is about expenses you don't want to incur, send it to the finance department for sanction. If you word the proposal badly enough, they will never sanction it.

Put the list of apologies, list of persons arriving late, and list of persons not arriving at all right at the beginning of the minutes of the meeting. Mention the names of those whose apologies were not valid. That scares them all into attending the future meetings, and that too on time.

Make sure that all of your suggestions are mentioned properly in the minutes of the meeting. Omit potentially troublesome suggestions, unless there has been a significant degree of discussion on them.

Always state at the end of the minutes of the meeting that the meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the chairperson. Thus it goes on record that they all thanked you conducting the meeting the way you did.