

Business Meetings

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Business meetings bring together team members to get things done. Feedback is gathered, strategies developed, problems identified and solved, and tasks completed. At least, this is what should be happening in business meetings. But to some teams, meetings are their biggest time-wasters, the most dreaded events of their work week, and the largest hindrance to their productivity. Many describe meetings as “too long” and “too many”.

Who’s on First, What’s on Second, I Don’t Know! ...

One reason for this description is that the discussions in meetings are reminiscent of the old Abbott and Costello baseball comedy skit where the questions seem clear enough but the answers are increasingly elusive. Who’s on first (base)? Answer: Who. What? Answer: What’s on second (base)... (If this is foreign to you, a search on www.Youtube.com can help.) Round and round they go with the questions only to end with one consistent answer of “I don’t know!”, which in the comedy skit is the name of the person on third base. Confusion for sure! The absence of the right people in a meeting to provide clear answers to questions, speak candidly on issues, and make decisions leads to circular, unproductive discussions.

Another reason that meetings are seen as being too long and too many is that the purpose of the meeting is unclear to those in attendance. “Why are we having this meeting?” is both a spoken and an unspoken question at various intervals when the purpose of the meeting is unclear. Without a clear purpose, there is no clear target to aim for or to hit. And so, the attendees arrive to accomplish nothing and leave having done that very well.

Nothing happens after the meeting and this is another reason that business meetings are despised. Even if the purpose of the meeting was clear and the discussions and activities of the meeting accomplished that purpose, action items still need to be taken seriously and completed after the meeting. Despite the success that occurred during the meeting, the absence of follow-up and follow-through makes the meeting a time-waster.

Sailing... Takes me away to where I’m going

There are some fundamental ways to improve the effectiveness of business meetings.

Set the Course. Determine and communicate the purpose of the meeting. Use a few words but enough words for others to understand the reason for the meeting. The purpose will almost dictate who needs to attend and what needs to be done. Prepare an agenda that lists in a few bullet points the activities of the meeting and who should be involved. Provide a location and timeline for the meeting; and prepare in advance the materials and tools needed during the meeting.

Steer the Course. Provide the direction needed to keep the discussions and activities in line with the purpose and agenda. Redirect sidebar conversations, draw in the attention of those being distracted by other things, probe for candor, and establish accountability.

In summary, business meetings are an integral part of work and business life because teamwork requires collaboration. Often this occurs through meetings. For this reason, effective meetings become an important element in the accomplishment of company objectives. But, leadership also plays a key role in the effectiveness of meetings. Planning before the meeting, direction during the meeting, and follow-up after the meeting are required components in order for meetings to become a good use of time and resources.