



## Top Ten Tips for Effective Meetings

Many professionals and executives spend about 30% of their time in meetings, most often not productive and consuming valuable time. Here are ten tips for holding effective meetings – meetings that are worth spending time and have positive outcomes.

1. **Why Meet?** Assess whether a meeting is the best alternative to accomplish the desired outcome. Assess who needs to be there to achieve the desired outcome. What is their contribution?
2. **Advance Planning.** Communicate the reason for the meeting and the contribution each attendee is expected to make for each meeting well in advance. Have a time limit and attendee list and a your expectations of each attendee (what should they bring or contribute or know and bring to the meeting) and send these out in advance.
3. **Open the Meeting.** State the intention of the meeting. Intention is not the same as desired outcome. Intention is what you intend the meeting to do and the reason you are meeting.
4. **State the Desired Result or Outcome.** A positive way to state this is – “At the end of this meeting we will...have, learn, understand, develop a plan”, or whatever you desire as the outcome and take-aways.
5. **State the Timeframe.** Make sure everyone knows that you will be meeting for a specific amount of time and state what will occur should items be incomplete when that time concludes. As an example, “We will be meeting for two hours, from 1pm-3pm. If we do not achieve our outcome, we will record outstanding items and assign tasks to individuals for completion.” Begin and end on time consistently, sending the message that the hours stated are real.
6. **Make Agreements and Guidelines.** When agreements are made at the beginning of the meeting, then everyone can hold themselves and others accountable for their behavior during the meeting. Another term used is “ground rules”. As an example ask, “What agreements do we need to make to make this a productive meeting?” Some agreements may include that cell phones are turned off, that everyone will listen to each member completely, that conversations are confidential, and other such agreements. If anyone violates the agreement, anyone in the group may indicate that the participants need to return to the agreement made at

the beginning. Each person is empowered and responsible for making this meeting effective and productive.

- 1. **State the roles.** In advance or at the beginning of the meeting, determine what role the participants will play. One person may be the facilitator, the scribe, the flipchart person, the timekeeper or whatever is needed to make the meeting run smoothly.
- 2. **Manage tangents.** If someone digresses into a tangential discussion, anyone in the room is able and responsible for bringing the conversation back to the intention. Stating the intention and the desired result at the beginning allows a participant to observe: "How does this bring us closer to our desired result?" or "Although this is an important point, it is outside of the scope of this meeting. How do we agree to handle this point later?" The facilitator should ensure that each member is heard and perspectives shared. Otherwise, be assured that the person feeling unheard will certainly keep inserting him/herself to be heard.
- 3. **Record outcomes.** In order to maintain momentum after the meeting, record the main points, challenges, obstacles, agreements from the meeting and discuss follow up action items. Be sure to assign someone responsible for each item, appropriate action steps and a timeline or deadline for completion. If there are any expectations to continue the conversation in a follow up meeting, you can determine the date and time of the next meeting and the expectations of each participant for the next meeting. Send the recorded notes out to each member within 24 hours and to each member who is not able to attend.
- 4. **Adjourn & Follow Up.** Five to ten minutes before the stated conclusion of the meeting, ask if there is anyone who has final comments or questions. Get feedback on what you should do more of, less of, start doing, keep doing, and stop doing. This feedback allows your group to calibrate each meeting and improve on the process. The person who is the project manager or facilitator would benefit from making agreements with participants on how and when there will be follow up and check-ins before the next meeting. This should be included in the notes as well.

Follow these guidelines and you will find that your meetings are more productive and eventually take less time. You will also notice a bonus in that the culture of how meetings are handled will change over time as each participant begins to follow this streamlined format for their own meetings. It may take a bit longer at the beginning as the group becomes accustomed to this format, but in the end everyone will be grateful that the meetings are indeed necessary and useful and productive. Your meetings will begin to flow more naturally and a culture of accountability and commitment will develop.

© 2007 Sophia Associates, Inc.

1834 George Avenue • Annapolis, MD 21401  
Tel: 443-433-0586 • Fax: 443-433-0587  
Email: [alicia@sophia-associates.com](mailto:alicia@sophia-associates.com)  
[www.sophia-associates.com](http://www.sophia-associates.com)