



Effective Meetings: 20 Ways to Have a More Productive Business Meeting

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Meetings can consume the better part of your day and leave you wondering, “What did I accomplish by attending one meeting after the next?” Before you schedule or attend another meeting, consider the goals and objectives of the meeting first.

1. Is it for informational purposes only? If so, can you obtain the necessary information from someone else?
2. Is it because you have something to contribute? If so, do you need to stay for the entire meeting?
3. Are you scheduling the meeting? If so, what steps will you take to ensure that it produces the results you need -- without the attendees feeling as though you’ve wasted their time?

Here are 20 techniques you can implement to ensure you are scheduling, managing and participating in productive meetings.

- 1. Start meetings on time.** This shows you respect everyone’s time. If you always start meetings late, you are setting an expectation and people will arrive late. Be in your chair a few minutes before the start time.
- 2. Show up on time.** When you show up late, you are telling everyone else that your time is more valuable than theirs -- combined.
- 3. Use an agenda.** Meetings that last more than 20 minutes need an agenda to ensure the group remains focused and the appropriate items are covered.
- 4. Distribute the agenda prior to the meeting.** This allows for prep time that may be necessary, rather than catching attendees off guard or risking those who will attend unprepared.
- 5. Keep it short.** A shorter meeting can accomplish just as much as one that is twice as long.
- 6. Schedule a 45-minute meeting instead of an hour.** Meetings have a way of filling the time scheduled -- don’t allow this to happen. Use the extra 15 minutes to accomplish another task, such as: filing meeting notes, inputting tasks as the result of the meeting into your task management system, check voicemail and return a call, grab a snack or take a break!

7. Don't allow scope creep. Discussing an unrelated topic is one of the easiest ways to derail a meeting and will frustrate others. This is another reason an agenda is necessary. If a topic comes up that isn't on the agenda, put it on the parking lot and return to it at a later date, or address it at the end if there is time.

8. Acknowledge the elephant in the room. If there is something standing in the way of making forward progress, acknowledge it up front and move on.

9. Choose an effective moderator or facilitator. If this is not your strength, enlist someone to help. Someone must be responsible for keeping the meeting on topic and moving forward.

10. Conduct meetings while standing. Can you accomplish just as much in a short meeting where you stand than in a longer meeting where you get comfortable in a chair?

11. Listen. Show respect to the person speaking because you'll want the same respect when it's your turn.

12. Stop multitasking. Establish a policy of no e-mail, texting, or web surfing during meetings. If the meeting is short enough this should not be problematic.

13. Be prepared. Don't be caught off guard if someone asks for your opinion or advice. No one appreciates the person that doesn't participate; what's the point of attending?

14. Don't speak just to be heard. Speak only if you have something meaningful to add. People stop listening to those who speak all the time but never really say anything.

15. Follow up. Most meetings are likely to create action items. Though everyone should be responsible for their own to-do's, people get busy. They might forget what they were asked to do or fail to communicate the completion. Designate someone to record action items and post them to a shared document. Someone will still need to remind others of their commitment.

16. Cancel a meeting. If you are the meeting organizer and you realize that you aren't prepared for it, do everyone a favor and reschedule it.

17. Can the meeting be replaced by a phone call? Ensure that every meeting you attend or schedule can't be replaced by a phone call. If a meeting is needed later as a result of the call; schedule it at that time.

18. End the meeting on time; if not early. Never assume that you can continue a meeting after the scheduled end time; you may not be aware of what attendees have scheduled next.

19. Use the calendar scheduling feature in Microsoft Outlook to schedule meetings. You will save time using this feature when scheduling a meeting with those in your company where you can view their calendars. You can also use this to schedule meetings outside your company; you just won't be able to see when someone is available.

20. Use Doodle. Doodle did a study in September 2010 that determined that professionals spend 4.75 hours a week to arrange 8.9 meetings. That amount of wasted time translates into a Friday afternoon off each week! Wouldn't that be more fun?

Productive meetings are possible when you implement these techniques. What can you do immediately to ensure that you're scheduling and managing a productive and efficient meeting?

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