

# Making Meetings More Effect

## Lesson Introduction

Let's face it, we are a social society. We like to meet. As companies diversify, and work teams are spread, not only, over cities and state but countries and continents, meetings become not a luxury, but a necessity. And it's not just companies; you can find meetings in schools, community groups, houses of worship, among others. Since meetings are not going anywhere, it is important that as leaders, we know how to maximize these time with our team members and make our meetings as effective as they can be.

## Lesson Objective

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify some strategies they can use to make their meetings more effective

## Lesson Content

People meet for a variety of reasons; to plan an event, to make a decision, to get work done. Almost no one is immune from meetings. Knowing this, it is important that, as leaders, we make the meetings that we do have run as smooth and as effectively as we can. For purposes of this lesson, we will discuss meeting effectiveness from two different angles. First, from a process stand point, [effectivemeetings.com](http://www.effectivemeetings.com/meetingbasics/training.asp) (<http://www.effectivemeetings.com/meetingbasics/training.asp>) has provided some great steps to take before, during and after your meetings to increase your effectiveness.

- Only hold a meeting if necessary- If you can get business done in another way (e.g. memos, emails, web form), do so.
- All meetings must have clear objectives- By establishing clear objectives for your participants, everyone knows going into the meeting what they need to accomplish before they leave.
- All meetings must have an agenda which includes- Just like meeting objectives, agendas provide road maps for people to follow when they attend the meeting. Agendas should include the topics for discussion, presenters if applicable, and order of business.
- Meeting information needs to be circulated to everyone prior to the meeting. When sending attendees information make sure to include meeting objectives, meeting agenda, location/date/time, any background information people need and assigned items for preparation
- Start meetings on time- This shows people that you are serious about effectively using your time.
- Meeting notes must be recorded and made part of the company's meeting information archives- by keeping an accurate record of your activities, you provide yourself with an invaluable tool for the future. The saying goes, don't reinvent the wheel. This record will help you remember that when something worked, why and how you came to the decisions to go in that direction.
- The decisions made by the group must be documented- Good, bad or ugly, everything must be recorded. See reasons above!

- Assigned action items must be documented and someone must be appointed to follow-up on the completion of all action items- If you are planning to accomplish anything in your meeting, someone needs to take action. To move forward, the actions must be completed.
- Meeting effectiveness must be reviewed at the end of each meeting and suggested improvements applied to the next meeting- All things must be reviewed for effectiveness, whether that is a meeting, a project, a program, etc. The feedback you receive can only, hopefully, help you to improve!

Tool Pack Consultants (<http://www.toolpack.com/meetings.html>) discusses meeting effectiveness from another direction- providing ground rules for all participants to follow when attending meetings.

- Stay focused- We all know how hard it can be to sit through long meetings, or listen to people discuss something complete off base. By staying focused we decrease the likelihood of slipping off topic or dragging our meeting out longer than it needs to be. The meeting's chair will be key in helping everyone stay focused, by squashing conflict, encouraging discussion where there might be silence, and overall keeps the discussion moving in the right direction.
- Get ideas flowing- How you do this can be determined by your group. Use whatever method works best for your situation and how many people are in your meeting. One way to get ideas flowing is to have a brainstorming session where all ideas are accepted (none are discussed until later). Other ways to get ideas flowing may be a suggestion box placed strategically where people may contribute anonymously, breaking the larger group into smaller discussion groups, etc.
- Expect some conflict- Conflict in itself is not a bad thing. Conflict helps people and organizations grow. As long as the conflict surrounds ideas and not people, and remains neutral (no personal attacks), conflict can serve to move a group forward when they reach an impasse.
- Spread the power around- While a chair or group leader can be helpful in keeping the group focused, do not let one person have all the decision making power. That negates the point of having a group and a group meeting. If people get to have a voice in decision making power, it provides buy-in and gives them a stake in the success or failure of whatever the group is working on.
- Always follow through- Nothing is worse than the social loafer. You know who I mean, that person who sits in the back of the room, might crack a joke or two, is happy to talk to you about topics having nothing to do with why everyone is gathered, and is otherwise content to just hang out without having any real responsibility. Each member of the group should have some level of responsibility and in between meetings there should be a process of follow-up in order to ensure that all members of the group are following through on their part.

People have become increasingly irritated by the thought of having to attend meetings because they have been to so many that have been ineffective. By implementing some of these steps in either your meeting process or in your ground rules, you can help your group become more effective when everyone gets together. Who knows, maybe people will enjoy attending meetings!

## Reflection Questions

- Look at the "process" steps to making your meetings more effective. Are you doing any of those now? What are some process steps you can take as a leader to make your meetings more effective? Would some be easier than others to implement? Why or why not?
- Look at the ground rules to making your making your meetings more effective. Are you doing any of those right now? Which of those that you are not doing could you easily complete for your next meeting?

## References:

Effective Meetings. (2004). Retrieved on October 1, 2006 at:  
(<http://www.effectivemeetings.com/meetingbasics/training.asp>)

Toolpack Consultants. (2001-2005). Retrieved on October 1, 2006 at:  
(<http://www.toolpack.com/meetings.html>)