



MAKING MEETINGS WORK



You might want to know

3M Meeting Network

Are you meeting more and enjoying it less? Have you and your co-workers come to regard business meetings merely as a necessary evil? It doesn't have to be that way. A decade of research by 3M into the dynamics and strategy of meetings shows that following several key principles actually can make meetings the most productive part of your working day.

Meetings are becoming more and more important, especially in industries where product development and marketing programs rely heavily on teamwork across departments. Survey results published by the Annenberg School of Communications at UCLA and the University of Minnesota's Training & Development Research Center show that executives on average spend 40%-50% of their working hours in meetings. Further evidence of the pervasiveness of meetings comes from a recent issue of Fast Company magazine, where organizational psychologist Jon Ryburg says he advises corporate clients to provide twice as much meeting space as they did 20 years ago.

Studies also point out a discouraging trend: Surveyed professionals agree that as much as 50% of that meeting time is unproductive and that up to 25% of meeting time is spent discussing irrelevant issues. Typically, they complain that meetings are too long, are scheduled without adequate time to prepare and end without any clear result.

Is the situation hopeless? Hardly. Books and seminars on improving meetings abound, as well as a host of consultants who specialize in various helpful meeting methods. What follows is a collection of some of the best tips for holding more focused, productive meetings that you can put into practice today. Give a few of these a try in your next meeting!

- Make sure that your meeting has a clear, stated purpose that all participants know and understand.
- Write an agenda organized to achieve that purpose and circulate it before the meeting. Be clear about the objective or desired outcome of the meeting. The agenda should contain only items that are pertinent to the objective. Attach a time budget to each agenda item so you can manage the discussion.
- At the beginning of the meeting briefly review the agenda with the group and adjust it, if required, to accommodate new, relevant items.
- Limit meetings to 90 minutes, or plan scheduled breaks into the agenda.
- Invite only people who can contribute to the meeting or who are stakeholders in the meeting's outcome. If other people simply need to know what happened, copy them on the meeting minutes instead of inviting them.
- Make sure the agenda is followed, paying attention to the time budgeted for each item. Having a deadline for a discussion "O.K., we only have five more minutes to wrap up this topic" will help focus the participants and keep the meeting on track.

- Use visual aids when possible and make sure those visuals are clear and colorful. Researchers at the University of Minnesota found that presentations are 43% more effective when visual aids were used.
- Make sure participants understand their respective roles and come prepared to contribute.
- Have the meeting chairperson summarize the meeting at the end. This should include acknowledging what has been accomplished and decided as well as any resulting action items and open issues.
- Lastly, send all relevant people a written summary of the meeting within 24 hours, including the same list of decisions, action items and open issues. This keeps the meeting's results and future actions clear in everyone's mind.

Your best strategic weapon for meeting effectiveness is a company philosophy that meetings are "real work." Back that up with meeting policies, training and resources, because industry leading businesses have learned that successful meetings are critical to making successful companies.

Make the meeting.

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www.mmm.com/meetings



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Related Reading

Innovative Meeting Management; Richard A. Swanson, Bonnie Ogram Knapp; University of Minnesota.

How To Make Meetings Work, Michael Doyle and David Straus, The Berkley Publishing Group, New York, NY 10016.

Mastering Meetings — Discovering the Hidden Potential of Effective Business Meetings; The 3M Meeting Management Team with Jeannine Drew; McGraw Hill.

Helpful Hints

Agree in advance to hold all phone calls to meeting members until the meeting breaks.

Keep the attendance list limited to those whose input or buy-in is critical.

Print and distribute copies of agenda and supporting documents before the meeting, leaving time for participants to prepare.

Don't leave the meeting without summarizing results and confirming actions to be taken.

For day-long meetings, hire a professional facilitator to help keep the meeting focused, productive and on track. This will free everyone else to participate fully.

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