

# Leadership Toolkit

## MEETING MANAGEMENT: A Guide To Holding Effective Meetings

Did you know that managers can spend up-to 75% of the work day in meetings? Despite this significant time commitment, participants often consider meetings to be unproductive and not the best use of their time.

Are your experiences similar? The good news is you have control when it comes to the meetings you hold.

This guide will help you understand the constructive reasons to hold a meeting, how to plan meetings and how to run them effectively.



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### Why Hold a Meeting

With people attending so many meetings, it becomes increasingly tempting for participants to tune out speakers, decrease participation and retain smaller portions of the information shared. The most productive meetings bring people together to brainstorm, solve problems, or make important decisions. To show your staff, colleagues and leaders that you truly value their time, it's important to hold meetings only when they are the best means to accomplish the objective. Attendees will appreciate your efforts and will be more engaged and enthusiastic when the time comes to participate.

To decide whether you need to hold a meeting, consider the purpose you want your meeting to serve and reflect on the following:

#### Reasons to Hold a Meeting

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- To provide new or important information, such as at a department, team or project meeting
- To make decisions, as would take place in a strategic planning retreat
- To solicit options, as in brainstorming session
- To allow for feedback or discussion, as in a focus group
- To build/strengthen a team, with the intent being to instill a sense of togetherness and commitment to the collective performance

#### Reasons Not to Hold a Meeting:

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- When you do not have the information or the available people you need to make a decision or solve a problem
- When your information has not or only slightly has changed since the last group update
- When the subject matter is too confidential or sensitive to be shared in a group format
- When the information you want to impart could be shared by more efficient means, such as e-mail or use of a SharePoint site
- When discourse among members is too high for a group session to be productive

### Alternatives to Traditional Meetings

Trying different meeting formats can often keep things interesting for teams, especially when they meet on a frequent basis. You might want to consider alternative formats, such as:

- **Virtual meetings** where attendees do not sit face-to face-in the same room but instead interact with each other via a remote technology, such as LifeSize or Skype. This can be a very efficient way for teams to meet when members sit in multiple locations or frequently travel.
- **Stand-Up meetings** (also known as a Huddles) where the attendees stand together in a designated spot for a short period of time to discuss a specific topic. These meetings often occur daily and last under 15-minutes. The intent of standing is to keep the discussion brief, but focused.

## Effective Meeting Planning

Once you decide to hold a meeting, the planning begins. If your meeting is going to be successful, you must think in advance about the participants. What is going to make for a good experience? Here are a few tips:

1. **Create an Agenda** - Clearly state why you are having the meeting and what you hope the group will accomplish. Understand why your topic is important to your invitees and articulate what benefit they will get from attending. Send out your agenda several days in advance of the meeting so participants can come prepared.
2. **Invite the Correct People** – Determine who really needs to attend to accomplish the meeting’s goals and only invite those people. If desired, afterwards you can send out a recap email summarizing your discussion so that a broader group can remain informed without needing to attend. Once you identify the key invitees, be sure to work around their calendars to schedule the meeting.
3. **Eliminate Digital Distractions** - Acknowledge the limited amount of time reserved for the discussion and ask participants to silence their digital devices and remove them from sight or not to bring them to the meeting.
4. **Stay Focused** – Once the meeting begins, get straight to the point. Be clear and concise in your thoughts. Stop participants who derail the topic. Respectfully acknowledge their thoughts and pull the topic back on track by reminding everyone of the limited time and specific purpose of the meeting.
5. **Encourage Everyone to Participate** - Demonstrate respect for your attendees by giving them each an opportunity to speak. Pay attention to their reactions to the discussion. If you spot someone trying to speak up but is being drowned out, call attention to them and give them the floor. If someone seems quiet or thoughtful, ask them directly for input.
6. **Summarize Meeting Results** - Before the meeting ends, recap key findings and future action items. Do not dismiss the meeting without reviewing who is doing what and by when. Address how well the group did towards achieving the goal of the meeting.
7. **Start and End Meetings on Time** - When meetings start late or go over time, attendees can lose focus and become frustrated. Their ability to retain information diminishes and respect for (you) the facilitator wanes. Starting and ending on time communicates you're organized and respect others' time.

## After the Meeting

Following the meeting, minutes should be sent out to ensure that everyone has the same understanding of what went on. The minutes should include a summary of the key decisions that were made, along with a list of all future action items, who will be responsible for those actions, relevant deadlines, and, if applicable, the date of next meeting. The minutes should be sent to all who attended the meeting, as well as to anyone who was invited but could not attend. They should be distributed within a day or two after the meeting, so the discussion will still be fresh in the attendees’ minds.

## Additional Considerations

In addition to a well-planned and run meeting, there are other considerations that contribute to making a participant’s experience a positive one.

- ✓ Book a comfortable room to accommodate the size of the crowd. Arrange the chairs in a circular or semi-circular pattern to facilitate interaction.
- ✓ If you are going to be using unfamiliar remote or presentation technology, it is prudent to test how it will work in advance.
- ✓ Be aware of the time of day that you schedule the meeting. No one really wants to meet at 4:00pm on a Friday.
- ✓ Thank everyone for their time. Time is precious.