

Q Our meetings have been called “Corporate Sominex.” How can I make our meetings more effective and engaging?

A: Meetings have become the bane of business. How many of you have gone to a meeting and left asking yourself: “What was the point of that? Why was I invited? Will any actions take place as a result of this meeting?”

Sign up for the free webinar “Corporate Sominex: How to Make Boring Meetings Effective and Engaging” by visiting www.missionfacilitators.com.

SOMETIMES JUST GETTING PEOPLE TO MEETINGS IS A TRICK. One company I worked with forced late arrivers to sing a song: Incentivize promptness through embarrassment. Back in the '90s, the amount and quality of food offered to employees at Microsoft determined how many people showed up for a meeting: Incentivize attendance through food.

So what's the cost to business when meetings are ineffective? Results of a recent national survey found that 69 percent of all meetings are considered unproductive. Factor in the average middle-class income and the average number of meetings we sit in on each day, the cost to business for unproductive meetings is \$44 per employee per day. That means a company with 200 employees could be losing \$2.3 million annually in unproductive meetings. Wow!

Office politics, laziness and avoiding accountability are why we have ineffective, boring meetings. Well-run, effective meetings inspire engagement, drive decisions and produce accountability for results. Here are sound ideas for how to make your meetings engaging and effective: (for more resources on effective meetings, visit www.missionfacilitators.com/meetings.)

MEETING PREPARATION

Establish doable goals. This will determine the meeting focus, agenda and who should attend.

Make sure you need a meeting. Because 65 percent of all meetings are not called for making decisions, can you accomplish your goals through e-mail, SharePoint or other communication medium?

Determine who must attend and what you want their involvement to be: brainstorming, helping make a decision or providing feedback to an issue or initiative?

Distribute reading materials 48 hours before the meeting. Attach a standard agenda that clarifies the reason for the meeting, desired outcome, who's attending and why.

DURING THE MEETING

Establish and follow meeting code of conduct.

Review the expected outcomes and agenda. Facilitator keeps discussion on track.

Avoid PowerPoint presentations; they distract more than they engage.

Involve each participant in the discussion by calling out quieter individuals and limiting air time for those who easily dominate the conversation.

Determine next-step actions by clarifying who “owns” the actions and when they're to be completed.

AFTER THE MEETING

Publish action-item list within 24 hours.

“Owners” of action items schedule time in their calendar to complete their items.

Because 80 percent of time in meetings is devoted to less than 20 percent of a company's long-term value, we have a huge opportunity that doesn't cost a dime. Without having to lay people off or cut expenses, companies can see real improvement in productivity by making meetings more effective and engaging. ■



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