

# Effective Meetings Produce Results: Tips for Meeting Management

## Ensure Results by Planning Before the Meeting

People spend so much time in meetings that turning meeting time into sustained results is a priority for successful organizations. Actions that make meetings successful require management before, during, and after the meeting.

If you neglect any one of these meeting management opportunities, your meetings will not bear the fruit you desire from the time you invest in meeting. Take these twelve meeting management actions to guide meeting attendees to achieve expected, positive, and constructive outcomes.

## Before the Meeting to Ensure Effective Meetings

Actions before the meeting establish the groundwork for accomplishing meeting results. You can do all of the needed follow-up, but without an effective meeting plan to start, your results will disappoint you.

### Plan the Meeting

Effective meetings that produce results, begin with meeting planning. First, identify whether other employees are needed to help you plan the meeting. Then, decide what you hope to accomplish by holding the meeting. Establish doable goals for your meeting. The goals you set will establish the framework for an effective meeting plan. As Stephen Covey says in the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Begin with the end in mind." Your meeting purpose will determine the meeting focus, the meeting agenda, and the meeting participants.

### Make Sure You Need a Meeting

Once you've developed your meeting plan, ensure that a meeting is the appropriate vehicle for accomplishing the set goals. To schedule and hold a meeting is expensive when you account for the time of the people attending. So, make efforts to determine that a meeting is the best opportunity to solve the problem, improve the process, or make an ongoing plan.

You may find that you can accomplish the meeting goals with an email discussion or by distributing and requesting information through the company newsletter. Make sure the meeting is needed and not just convenient for you – you'll get better results from attendees.

### **Ensure Appropriate Participation at the Meeting**

If a meeting is the appropriate means to accomplish your goals, check with the participants who must attend for the meeting to succeed. The needed attendees must be available to attend the meeting. Postpone the meeting rather than holding a meeting without critical staff members. If a delegate attends in the place of a crucial decision maker, make sure the designated staff member has the authority to make decisions – or postpone the meeting.

### **Distribute and Review Pre-work Prior to the Meeting**

How many meetings have you attended that started out with the meeting facilitator passing out a ream of handouts or projecting a Microsoft PowerPoint slide for discussion? Frustrating? You bet. The meeting becomes a group read-in, hardly productive for goal accomplishment. You can make meetings most productive and ensure results by providing necessary pre-work in advance of the actual meeting. Providing pre-work, charts, graphs, and reading material 48 hours before a meeting affects meeting success. The more preparation time you allot, the better prepared people will be for your meeting.

Documentation that will help you achieve the meeting goals can include reports; data and charts such as competitive information, sales month-to-date, and production plans; Microsoft PowerPoint slides that illustrate key discussion points; and minutes, notes and follow-up from earlier or related meetings and projects. Pre-work distributed in a timely manner, with the serious expectation that attendees will read the pre-work before the meeting, helps ensure meeting success.

### **During the Meeting to Ensure Effective Meetings**

Effective use of meeting time builds enthusiasm for the topic. It generates commitment and a feeling of accomplishment from the participants. People feel part of something bigger than their day-to-day challenges. Therefore, a

well-facilitated, active meeting, that sets the stage for follow-up, will produce meeting results.

## **Effective Meeting Facilitation**

The meeting leader sets a positive, productive tone for interaction among the meeting participants. Effective meeting facilitation starts with a review of the goals, or anticipated outcomes, and the agenda. The facilitator helps group members stay focused and productive. Meeting design and the agenda set the framework for the meeting. An effective facilitator, who keeps participants on track, ensures the accomplishment of expected, desired results from the meeting.

## **Use the Pre-work in the Meeting**

Use or reference the pre-work and other information supplied prior to the meeting during the meeting. You reinforce the need for participants to spend the time needed upfront to review material that is integral to accomplishing the desired results. Your participants will prepare prior to attending your meetings and your results will bear testimony to solid preparation and leadership.

## **Involve Each Participant in Actions**

Every work group has various personalities that show up for meetings. You have quiet coworkers and people who try to dominate every platform. Whether facilitating or attending the meeting, you need to involve each attendee in the accomplishment of the meeting goals.

This ensures that each participant is invested in the topic of the meeting and in the follow-up. You'll accomplish more results with the whole team pulling than with one dominant staff person trying to push everyone else up the hill.

## **Create an Effective Meeting Follow-up Plan**

During the meeting, make a follow-up plan with action items. Effective plans include:

- The specific action item
- The name of the person who committed to "owning" the accomplishment of the action item
- The due date of the action item

- An agreement about what constitutes completion of the action item.

Discuss real life scenarios and barriers to success that team members may experience as they try to accomplish the items that will produce the required results. Set a time for your next meeting, if needed, while participants are in attendance.

## **After the Meeting to Ensure Effective Meetings**

Actions and planning before and during the meeting play a big role in helping you achieve expected, positive, and constructive outcomes. Your actions following the meeting are just as crucial. Follow-up at the next scheduled meeting is never enough of an investment to ensure results.

## **Publish Meeting Minutes**

Begin by publishing your minutes and action plan within 24 hours. People will most effectively contribute to results if they get started on action items right away. They still have a fresh memory of the meeting, the discussion and the rationale for the chosen direction. They remain enthusiastic and ready to get started. A delay in the distribution of minutes will hurt your results since most people wait for the minutes to arrive before they begin to tackle their commitments.

## **Effective Meeting Follow-up**

Respecting and observing deadlines and follow-up will help you achieve results from your meetings. The deadline was established during the meeting. Following the meeting, each person with an action item should also make a plan for their personal accomplishment of their commitment. Whether they write the steps in their planner, delegate the tasks to another staff person, or just complete the task, the individual is responsible for follow-up.

So is the meeting planner. You can improve meeting results by following up with each person who has an action item mid-way between meetings. Your goal is to check progress and ensure that tasks are underway. Remember that what you ask about gets accomplished.

## **Accountability for Follow-up during the Next Meeting**

Have you ever sat in a follow-up meeting that consisted of each participant telling the group why they were unable to accomplish their commitment? I have, and the result is deplorable. Establishing the norm or custom of accountability for results begins early in your meeting cycle.

Follow-up by the facilitator mid-way between meetings helps, but the group must make failure to keep commitments unacceptable. Report on progress and outcomes at the next meeting and expect that all will have been accomplished. Alternatively, check progress at the next meeting and if there is a real roadblock to progress, determine how to proceed.

## **Debrief the Meeting Process for Continuous Improvement**

The practice of debriefing each meeting is a powerful tool for continuous improvement. Participants take turns discussing what was effective or ineffective about the current meeting process. They also discuss the progress they feel the group is making on the topic of the meeting.

Taking continuous improvement to another level, successful teams debrief their entire project as well as the process to determine how effectively they managed to create results. Future meetings reflect the evaluation. Meetings evolve as an even more effective tool for creating organization results.

## **Conclusion**

Results are achievable and predictable from well-planned and implemented meetings. Follow these twelve recommendations to ensure that meeting attendees achieve expected, positive, and constructive outcomes from the time invested in meetings.