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Seven Steps to Running the Most Effective Meeting Possible

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This article is by Neal Hartman, a senior lecturer in managerial communication at MIT [Sloan School of Management](http://www.forbes.com/colleges/massachusetts-institute-of-technology/sloan-school-of-management/) (<http://www.forbes.com/colleges/massachusetts-institute-of-technology/sloan-school-of-management/>).

The meeting that drones on and on; the meeting where everyone sits fiddling with his or her smartphone; the meeting that Doug from Accounting hijacks; or the meeting where almost everyone in the room is wondering the same thing: Why am I even here?

Meetings fill an increasing number of hours in the workday, and yet most employees consider them as a waste of time. According to a survey of U.S. professionals by Salary.com, meetings ranked as the number one office productivity killer. (Dealing with office politics was a close second, according to the 2012 survey.)

But there are ways to run effective, efficient meetings that leave your employees feeling energized and excited about their work. Here are some tips:

1, Make your objective clear. A meeting must have a specific and defined purpose. Before you send that calendar invite, ask yourself: What do I seek to



accomplish? Are you alerting people to a change in management or a shift in strategy? Are you seeking input from others on a problem facing the company? Are you looking to arrive at a decision on a particular matter? Standing meetings with vague purposes, such as “status updates,” are rarely a good use of time.

2. Consider who is invited. When you’re calling a meeting, take time to think about who really needs to be there. If you’re announcing a change, invite the people who are affected by the announcement. If you’re trying to solve a problem, invite the people who will be good sources of information for a solution. When people feel that what’s being discussed isn’t relevant to them, or that they lack the skills or expertise to be of assistance, they’ll view their attendance at the meeting as a waste of time.

3. Stick to your schedule. Create an agenda that lays out everything you plan to cover in the meeting, along with a timeline that allots a certain number of minutes to each item, and email it to people in advance. Once you’re in the meeting, put that agenda up on a screen or whiteboard for others to see. This keeps people focused.

4. Take no hostages. Nothing derails a meeting faster than one person talking more than his fair share. If you notice one person monopolizing the conversation, call him out. Say, “We appreciate your contributions, but now we need input from others before making a decision.” Be public about it. Establishing ground rules early on will create a framework for how your group functions.

5. Start on time, end on time. If you have responsibility for running regular meetings and you have a reputation for being someone who starts and ends promptly, you will be amazed how many of your colleagues will make every effort to attend your meetings. People appreciate it when you understand that their time is valuable. Another note on time: Do not schedule any meeting to last longer than an hour. Sixty minutes is generally the longest time workers can remain truly engaged.

6. Ban technology. The reality is that if people are allowed to bring iPads or BlackBerries into the room, they won’t be focusing on the meeting or contributing to it. Instead, they’ll be emailing, surfing the web, or just playing around with their technology. Eyes up here, please.

7. Follow up. It’s quite common for people to come away from the same meeting with very different interpretations of what went on. To reduce this risk, email a memo highlighting what was accomplished to all who attended within 24 hours after



the meeting. Document the responsibilities given, tasks delegated, and any assigned deadlines. That way, everyone will be on the same page.

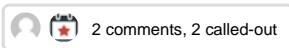
Meetings truly can be valuable and productive. You just have to take the steps to make them that way.

How To Run A Meeting



Prepare to the max

Carefully draw up your meeting agenda in advance, Katz advises. But don't stop there. Make sure the room where you plan to hold the meeting is prepped and ready, down to heating and cooling, lighting and refreshments.



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