



MEETINGS

3. How to compile a meeting agenda that really works

Meetings, whether they are one-on-one discussions or gatherings of five or twenty people, are an important part of working life – but they are also time consuming. Many people often say they are unproductive, costly, boring and many times unnecessary. Are they always needed? And so many of them?

Outlined below are a series of pointers to assist you decide if the latest meeting you have organised or been invited to, is really going to lead to improved efficiencies, better communication and improved profitability.

- 1. How to prepare for a meeting**
- 2. How to conduct a successful meeting**
- 3. How to compile a meeting agenda that really works**
- 4. How to get the most out of meetings you chair**
- 5. How to make a valuable contribution to a meeting**
- 6. How to overcome problems at meetings**
- 7. How to deal with disruptive individuals at meetings**
- 8. How to reduce the number of time consuming meetings**

3. How to compile a meeting agenda that really works

This is the third in a series of eight “How to” guides.

- 1. Be aware of the need for an agenda**
 - the agenda provides the meeting with a purpose, direction, confidence and control
 - it is a commitment that the time allocated to the meeting will focus on the items listed
- 2. Decide on the degree of formality required**
 - small meetings may not require an agenda as it can be set in the first few minutes
 - formal or larger meetings, require an agenda that may include, apologies, minutes of the last meeting, matters arising from those minutes etc
- 3. List the items**
 - decide on the items for discussion at least a few days prior to the meeting
 - ask for participant/s to contribute items or specific topics for discussion
 - limit items according to time and/or priority



4. Sequence the items

- sequencing of agenda items can influence the success or failure of your meeting
- consider:
 - if an item needs mental energy, clear heads and bright ideas, then put it high on the list,
 - hold back items of interest, and introduce the star item when attention lags
 - Less interesting items should follow a very challenging one, thus giving participants time to recover
 - if a participant, needs to arrive late or leave early, ensure an item requiring their input is placed on the agenda in a position suited to their arrangements
 - items with a potential for attracting conflict could be placed later when members have less energy to go for each other, or looking at the other side of the coin, problems are best solved when people have the energy to devote to the issue
 - begin and end all meetings on a positive note, with items which unify your team

5. Structure the agenda

- Features of a good agenda are:
 - Title, date and location and maybe a list of participants
 - Definite start and finish times, with few meetings being productive longer than 2 hours, unless there are breaks
 - Topics, the person responsible for introducing and leading the discussion, the objective and a time limit for each item

6. Gather and assemble any background papers

- any background material required to be read prior to the meeting should accompany the agenda

7. Distribute the agenda in advance

- distribute the agenda and any background papers at least 2-3 days in advance

8. Use the agenda to monitor the meeting.

- at the beginning of the meeting, commence by seeking agreement for the agenda, then stick to the allocated order and times
- the temptation is often to digress from the items. In order to gain respect as a productive chairperson stay with the agenda.

Success tip.

A meeting with no agenda will have no focus and very little in the way of constructive outcomes.

It is easy to be side-tracked, and with participants running in all directions future meetings will not be attended by enthusiastic members.

The more care and time you take with the preparation for any meeting, the more productive the meeting will be.

Reference: Flanagan, N. & Finger, J. *“Just about everything a Manager needs to know”* Plum Press Brisbane, Australia 1998.