



MEETINGS

5. How to make a valuable contribution to a meeting

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?

Today, I will outline 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**

5. How to make a valuable contribution to a meeting (10 pointers in all)

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

- 1. Understand why you have been asked to participate**
 - *Consider the following questions, and channel your efforts accordingly:*
 - *Have I been brought in to simply fill a gap?*
 - *Am I representing a department, unit or specialist group?*
 - *Have I been brought in to provide expertise in a particular area?*
 - *Am I here as the organisation’s bright-young-person with ideas?*
 - *Am I here as the voice of experience, the steady influence?*
- 2. Know the other participants**
 - *Find out all you can about the other participants – their likes and dislikes, strong and weak points, the power brokers, the way they operate, how they react to new ideas and proposals.*
 - *By being aware of this, you can adopt effective tactics for dealing with them*



3. Arrive prepared

- *Prepare yourself by reviewing the agenda and any working papers in advance*
- *Focus on any items for your particular attention and anticipate any needs the group will have for data you can bring*
- *Prepare for your involvement by compiling handouts or charts, working up suggestions or recommendations, and making brief notes from which to speak*
- *The amount of preparation will determine how others will view you – as a passenger or a valued participant*

4. Arrive early and use the time wisely

- *Arrive early and take the opportunity, if necessary to introduce yourself to the other participants*
- *Use the waiting time to perhaps learn their position on certain agenda items*

5. Talk up, get involved

- *Don't hesitate to get involved in the action. A well-chosen question can often help break the ice*
- *Research indicates that talkative participants usually contribute the most useful remarks, have the best ideas, and impress other members*
- *Be aware that, this may make you unpopular with some, since productivity can be seen by some as a kind of control mechanism and therefore resented*

6. Make your presence felt

- *Make your points clearly, succinctly and positively; however remain silent when you have nothing useful to say.*
- *Listen, observe and save your arguments for a really telling point.*
- *Look for opportunities to build on the ideas of others, pose 'what if' questions, seek clarification of relevant issues, be supportive with constructive comments and be open minded and flexible and above all respectful of other's contributions*

7. Be an active listener

- *Often too many people try and talk at once, resulting in too many interruptions*
- *Practise the skill of active listening as it will lead to better understanding and good questions*

8. Be willing to learn

- *Go into meetings with an attitude of being prepared to learn*
- *During meetings you can learn from others, be open to constructive criticism and integrate the ideas of others into your proposal*

9. Volunteer to wrap up the meeting

- *Impress the chairperson by volunteering to sum up the meeting and run through the action items from the meeting*

10. Adhere to the rules of meeting etiquette.

- *Consider the following:*
 - *Avoid interrupting*
 - *Refrain from distracting behaviour, such as pencil tapping*
 - *Avoid side comments to your neighbour. If you want to contribute do it to the whole group*



Success tip.

Improved participation in a meeting is a learned skill. Practice and observation train the mind.

Good participation is fortunately contagious as is poor participation. Set an example as a participant and others will follow.

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