

WORKPLACE MATTERS

10 tips to make workplace meetings more effective

Nothing drains morale faster than a long, unproductive meeting. In fact, this comes up frequently as one of employees' top peeves.



Robin Onaclea Scott

It's easy to recognize bad meetings, but the qualities that characterize a good meeting are more elusive. It isn't simply a matter of bringing snacks. Productive and engaging meetings require clear goals, constructive communication and a strong facilitator.

Here are some tips:

1. Decide if a meeting is needed. Too often, a meeting is called when an update or status report could be circulated. If one-way communication works, you don't need a meeting. If you need feedback or want to build consensus, then a meeting is best.

2. Invite only the necessary people. These could include employees whose work is related to agenda items, decision-makers who have the power to move an idea forward or those who have expertise the group needs to fully understand an issue.

3. Set objectives for the meeting. The more concrete your meeting objectives, the more focused your agenda will be. Keep objectives brief.

4. Develop an agenda. Use your objectives to generate an agenda. Get input from other participants. Be clear about who will lead each agenda item and whether it's an update, a discussion or an action item. E-mail the agenda out at least a day in advance. In larger meetings, it is helpful to assign a specific time frame to each topic.

5. Take ownership. Good leaders make good meetings. Start on time and end on time. If the meeting always starts late, people will not show up promptly. As a facilitator, make it clear that you will keep the discussion timely, useful and relevant.

A key to maintaining your schedule is to stay on topic. If the conversation gets off topic, refocus the group.

6. Get input. It's the facilitator's responsibility to make sure everyone is heard. You may need to encourage the quiet types and move away from those that are dominating the discussion. Attendees may be shy about sharing their thoughts if they sense the facilitator already has a strong point of view. So don't voice your own opinion during the discussion. Also, don't dismiss ideas even when they don't seem useful. Thank people for their input. Offer praise.

7. Assign action items. Meeting objectives usually are intended to produce results or resolve a problem. Don't finish any discussion without deciding how to act on it. Then assign tasks and deadlines.

8. Rally the troops. Many meetings trail off at the end. Energize your group by closing with a review of what decisions you reached and what the next action will be. Everyone should leave knowing expectations and deadlines. Finally, wrap up with an upbeat quote, story or praise.

9. Follow up. Make sure you have a system to track what was decided and everyone's assignments.

10. Strive for continuous improvement. Review your objectives after every meeting. Did the outcome meet those objectives? Did the group discussion stay on target? If not, consider how to improve.

By following these guidelines, you can restore your employees' belief that meetings can have value, and by engaging employees in meaningful discussions, you'll boost morale.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or 541-682-7224.