

12 Best Practices for Effective Creative Meetings

What are Your Meeting Horror Stories?

We've all got them! Maybe it was a meeting you attended. Perhaps it was one you had to run.

Poorly run meetings:

These can be boring, frustrating or downright exasperating. When a meeting is inefficient tons of time is lost in lack of agenda, poor pacing, sidebars, incompetent leadership, deliberate derailing of the meeting by participants.

Wasters of Time

You know what these are like. Have you ever been to a meeting that is a deliberate user of time—time that might well be spent on important matters.....if you weren't tied up in this meeting!

Meetings with no Clear Intent

Admit it. You've attended meetings where you have no idea about the goals—and you're pretty sure the presenter hasn't any idea what he/she hopes to accomplish either.

What Makes a Meeting Productive?

Even though many of us detest meetings, we have to admit that they are needed if you want a team committed to productivity, shared decision-making and a collaborative environment.

Because meetings are expensive in both dollars and work time, it's important that they be productive. How can you assure this is so?

Forbes recently polled people at all levels of the work force. This is what they discovered when they asked: What makes a meeting productive?

1. Tell Them Why They're There

Do not leave attenders puzzled about why they're there. Set a clear time-based agenda. Send out a memo stating why you're holding this meeting and what you hope to accomplish. Be clear and succinct.

Share the agenda in advance. Tell participants what they need to do and what they should bring to the meetings.

2. Be Selective

Invite only essential members. Don't get caught up in worrying about office politics and whose feelings might be hurt by not being invited. Ask those whose input is crucial. Let the others stay where they can be productive. Remember: The more who attend the less effective a group is at reaching its goal.

3. Time Items Carefully

Meetings don't need to go on and on just to fill an afternoon. Consider using technology to hold a meeting participant can attend wherever they are. Make participants aware of how long the meeting is going to be and how long you will spend on each item.

A [study](#) by *Harvard Business* shows that a thirty-minute meeting is often as effective as a half-day meeting.

4. Consider Logistics

If travel is involved or if your participants must get connected remotely or even if it's a matter of passing out materials or serving coffee or checking attendance, make sure to build in sufficient time for this. A meeting that starts exactly on time is off to a good start.

5. Get Rid of High Tech Presentation Techniques

Have you ever been to a meeting where the presenter reads from his PowerPoint slides? Technology (videos, graphics, charts, slides...) should be used to emphasize a point. They should not BE the presentation. Too often presenters put their audience to sleep by reading an entire PowerPoint slideshow. This is insulting to your participants and a waste of time.

6. Consider Setting

The boardroom is not always the best place for a productive meeting. Perhaps the plant floor is better if you need to refer to sites or want to remind participants about product or technique. Think about outdoor venues, teleconferencing, walk-and-talk. Getting out of the office often stimulates ideas.

7. Add some Social Stimulation

No. I am not talking about strippers or bungee jumping. That said, an ice breaker or a short trivia contest loosens up the group. It may also be a boon in team building and a stimulate conversation.

8. Have an Unplugged Meeting

Most people who attend meetings—regardless of age—are glued to their handheld devices. Lead by example. Come without your electronic equipment and request that others do the same. Here's why: A [research study](#) by James Döubek shows that learners with electronic devices remember less than those who merely listen and those who take notes using a pen and a notebook.

9. Technology is Efficient but...

Admit it! You've let your mind wander during conference calls, virtual meetings, and teleconferences haven't you? A study discovered that almost 70% of participants are doing other work when they are "attending" a [teleconference or conference call](#).

Another study showed that participants have actually gone to the bathroom or for a coffee or a snack during a technologically-staged meeting.

Steven Key [says](#) that there's no substitute for face-to-face meetings, though.

10. Lead with Your Goal; Close with Recap

Conclude by reviewing your original aim. Reiterate your key points. This is a good time for one of those PowerPoint slides.

11. Be Goal-Oriented, Not Politically Driven

Let's face it. Too many meetings are about ass covering. People are invited not because of their contributions but because it's good to be seen with them. If you want to accomplish something invite those who you know will help you do so. The meeting's focus should be on that clearly worded objective you opened with.

12. Hold Participants Accountable

There was a clearly worded objective for your meeting. You carefully prepared an agenda. You invited those who would help you accomplish your goal. Now be productive. Start on time. Follow your agenda. Keep the meeting on time. Stick to the plan. If participants were expected to come prepared, note those who were not and speak to them privately. Tell those in attendances why you need them and how they can help you achieve the stated objective.

Why Meetings become Unproductive

Adam Pittampalli [explored](#) why meetings become unproductive. He discovered that "passengers" are those who merely show up. They have no investment in the agenda other than what it can do for them with the least amount of their input. He hypothesizes that this arose long ago when our forefathers' focus was on survival.

One way to ensure people invest of themselves is to make follow-up part of the meeting. Conclude the meeting not only with a recap of the objective and what was accomplished. List what needs to get done and who is responsible for each of these. Make sure everyone has a copy of that list. Check frequently to see how things are coming along and if there is anything further each participant needs.

Model involvement, objective-orientation, commitment and team spirit. Lead by example. Create a culture of accountability.

Do these essentials and your meetings are going to be a success.