OPEN Forum

How to Run an Effective Meeting

Mark Di Vincenzo

February 4, 2012

People hate meetings that waste time. Many meetings don't start on time. They're unfocused. And they last too long.

The meeting consultancy TimeBridge suggests that 45 minutes is a good average for most meetings. A meeting expert says that 43 percent of meeting time is wasted.

But workplace meetings are here to stay. Managers and experts say it's important to make them more efficient. Here are 10 tips to help you run effective and productive meetings.

1. Question the need

Before you schedule a meeting, decide whether it's necessary. Maybe you can communicate just as effectively by e-mail, phone or by calling someone into your office.

"This is an important decision to make," said William Muir, president of Vectec, a Virginia website-development firm. "You don't want to meet if you don't need to meet."

2. Invite only essential people

Meetings with fewer people in the room have the potential to end faster. If you have regular attendees at your meetings who rarely speak, ask yourself if they really need to be there.

3. Create an agenda and stick with it

Make sure the participants know why they're summoned to the meeting. Don't waste their time by bringing up issues that are not on the agenda. Make it clear to attendees how long you expect the meeting to last. Ideally, it will be a short meeting. But it needs to be long enough to ensure that everyone leaves with a clear understanding of the discussion and the decisions.

"Never meet without an agenda," Muir said. "You've got to have one."

4. Be clear on expectations

Are they there to listen, to brainstorm, to give their input or to debate? Let them know.

5. Single out latecomers

Lock the door to the meeting room if you can after the meeting is scheduled to start. Or, require late arrivals to fetch coffee or water for the others. Whatever you do, do it in a way that will cause them to change their behavior but not humiliate them.

6. Start with the important stuff

If the meeting agenda includes more than one topic, make sure the first is the most important one. People are more likely to arrive on time and ensure that the most important issue will be discussed.

7. Ban food

Unless it's a lunch meeting, don't provide food, which can be a distraction and lengthen the meeting. It also causes a mess for someone to have to clean.

8. Ban electronics

Unless they're needed, ban BlackBerries, iPods, laptops, smartphones and other distractions.

9. Stand up

If time is of the essence, consider holding a meeting in a place withou chairs. The Japanese have been doing it for years, and their meetings are known to be short and sweet.

10. Summarize

To close the meeting, the person in charge should briefly review what participants accomplished and what the organizer expects them to do, if anything. Also, consider sending a succinct e-mail that summarizes the meeting.

Mark Di Vincenzo is a journalist with 24 years of experience and a New York Times *best-selling author. He blogs for Contently.*

Image credit: Thinkstock

http://www.openforum.com/articles/how-to-run-an-effective-meeting-a-small-business-guide?extlink=em-openf-SBdaily