



Chapter 15

Running Better Meetings

Running More Effective Meetings

On its face, running a meeting seems simple enough, yet...

- How many times have you been to horrible meetings?
- Felt your time was wasted by attending?
- Left a meeting without knowing what was accomplished?
- Left a meeting without knowing what the next step was?

Too often meetings are held without a clear purpose or plan.

Purpose of Meetings:

- Formulate an action plan to accomplish a task.
- Resolving issues which require the presence of those attending.
- Update attendees on progress of others when needed.

Key Principles	Common Pitfalls
<p>1) Functionality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You meet for specific reasons. - Expect to come out of the meeting with an executable plan. - Action plans are specific, have timelines, and have delegated roles for all attendees - Only people relevant to the meeting topic should have to attend. <p>2) Transparency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key members have input on the agenda beforehand. - Agenda distributed to all attendees before the meeting. - Topic and contents known to members, even if they are not attending the meeting. <p>3) Discipline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topical. Concerns are discussed only when they appear on the agenda. Time can be set aside for additional items, but know when to take discussions offline. - Timely. Each agenda item is timed. If discussion exceeds time, either table it, or agree to continue discussion with the explicit intention to sacrifice subsequent items. Establish this early on. <p>4) Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speakers must respect listeners. - Listeners must respect speakers. 	<p>1) Unnecessary Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes having a meeting is, itself, a mistake. - Can the required tasks simply be done or delegated without the group's input? Must you talk about it before just doing it? - Scheduling meetings regularly is still important, but make each have a purpose. <p>2) Obsession with Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serious activists should not go to meeting to seek emotional affirmation from the group. - The primary concern is to get the job done. Process obsession may unnecessarily occupy too much time, and end up disrespecting everyone's time. <p>3) Dominating Personalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes people need to shut up and listen. It is more polite to ask 'get to the point' or 'how is this relevant?' than to waste everyone's time. Embrace this interruption. - Discussion leaders need to be sure they are not dominating the discussion. They are leading a meeting, not emceeding an event. - 50% rule. No one needs to speak more than 50% of the time. <p>4) No Plan. No Action. No Follow up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Without this, you didn't really have a meeting. Be specific about all of the above.

Pre-Meeting Prep

- First, determine if you really need the meeting. Do you need the group decide your next course of action, or does it merely require quick decision-making?
- Next, who must attend? A good way to figure it out is to ask yourself what that person's delegated task might be at the end of the meeting. If you know that people will walk away without a task, why did they attend in the first place? Meetings can become dramatically less effective when the number exceeds 20 or so people, especially when the agenda is open or unclear. Larger meetings tend to become more informational than discussion-oriented.
- Materials and Visuals – Handouts should be created and distributed before the meeting if possible, with extras on hand at the meeting. Bring pens, pads, markers, whiteboards and other necessary materials. Generally visuals are helpful in clarifying topics and keeping people's attention.

The Agenda

- Always have one for any meeting that exceeds 10-15 minutes (most meetings) or meetings that exceed one topic.
- Ask for input from your attendees as your making you agenda to make sure you cover everything you need to cover, and so you can table unrelated issues before they pop up at the meeting.
- Agendas should be sent out before the meeting so people know how their time will be spent and can come prepared to discuss and decide.

Running the Meeting

- **Start on time.** Respect people who made it on time by starting on time. This sets the tone for the meeting.
- **Roles**
 - Leader/Facilitator: Runs the meeting. Usually responsible for calling votes, moving to the next topic, and keeping focused. Leaders should not speak through the whole meeting. If they want, they can organize a lecture, not run a meeting.
 - Note taker: Take minutes. Highlight delegated tasks. First post-meeting task is to send the notes out to all attendees.
 - Timekeeper: Makes sure each agenda item stays on time. The group can rely on this person to interrupt when needed.
 - Attendees: Attendees should generally be involved in the meeting. For example, each agenda item could be handled by a different attendee.
- **Decision-Making.** Choose a process that doesn't bog you down. Consensus is typically for small, homogenous groups. Majority votes are often more practical, just as long as the facilitator can manage and end debates in a timely fashion and call for a vote.

Ending the Meeting

- Review the plan of action. This is a good spot for people to prove that the meeting was held for a reason. One suggestion is to go around the table and have each person state his or her next steps. The note-taker can also state delegated roles for each person. At the end of the meeting, if you've worked out a goal, it should come with a plan to achieve it
- Action plans should all have a timeline. X item is done by Y time.
- Establish clear follow-up procedures – When, how, etc. Since each task is done by a certain time, and this time is known to the group, follow up should be easy.

Tip:
Since your meeting should start on time, ask likely latecomers to arrive early. A trick is to ask certain people to help 'set up the room', or ask them to a 'pre-meeting to discuss X' to get them there earlier.

Tip:
Each item should have a number of minutes to be spent printed alongside the item. Sticking to the allotted times helps you facilitate a timely meeting.

Tip:
Want your meeting to last less than 30 min? Make it a standing meeting. Short meetings will stay short if everyone stands during the meeting. No one sits, no one wastes time.

Tip:
Someone sucking up the time? Let them know, "We're all very busy here." And frame the interruption in terms of the needs of the group.

Post-Meeting Follow up

- Send out the minutes.
- Each person or team completes task on announced schedule or makes known to the appropriate person that the task will not be done on schedule.
- Examples of follow up plan can include reports (even brief summaries) sent into one person at particular times (weekly, halfway through, upon completion, etc), or one person calling each team at particular times to compile progress reports.

Sample Agenda

Tri-County DFA Host Steering Meeting	
July 25, 2005, 6pm-7pm	
I. Introductions (Jane)	9 min
- Name, city, and ONE highlight from your DFA-Link group	
II. Anytown's report on battling the Wal-Mart rezoning initiative (John)	
16 min	
- Latest update	
- Next steps	
- Suggestions for action items for neighboring DFA-Link groups	
III. DFAtown's efforts to bring in a statewide DFA training	
- Logistics (Joe)	12 min
○ Venue options narrowed down	
○ Next step: Food	
○ Housing Coordination	
- Attendance (Janice)	7 min
○ Emails strategies	
○ Calling our DFA-Link membership for reminders	
- Report from Burlington (Jesse)	4 min
IV. Local elections starting up (Jordan)	8 min
- Do groups have an endorsement process?	
- Has anyone been approached?	
- Who will bottom line this initiative?	
V. Closing (Jared)	4 min
- Review action items and delegated roles	
- Follow-up Plans	
- Dinner at Oasis Diner	

