

Five Top Tips for Having Great Meetings

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Many people find meetings challenging. These five tips will help your meetings be more successful, enjoyable and productive.

1. Start with something positive

How? Ask everyone a question like *'What's been your greatest success, big or small, since we last met?' or 'Which of your achievements over the last month are you most proud of?' or 'Which of your staff do you feel most grateful too, and why?'*

Why? Because sharing good news boosts mood (and shares resources) which enhances creativity and problem-solving abilities

2. Ask more questions than statements

How? Consider the question to which your statement is an answer and ask the question rather than make your statement. So, if you are thinking *'that won't work'* ask *'What might be the downsides and how could we guard against them?'* If you are thinking *'We need to raise sales'* ask *'How can we turn this around?' or 'How can we improve revenue?'*

Why? Statements tend to offer people a binary position of either agreeing or disagreeing. Questions encourage people to engage in a different way which can produce a richer conversation, with more room for nuance, opinion shift and resourcefulness

3. Think beyond the boundaries of the group

How? Ask questions that bring other stakeholders to the topic under discussion into view, for example *'How might finance react to that suggestion?', 'How would we accommodate customers who...?', 'What will marketing need to know to create a great pitch for us?'*

Why? Because considering the needs and perspectives of the whole system even when it is not in the room leads to better, more sustainable, decision-making

4. Focus on the people who are there, not those who aren't

How? Start the meeting on time (unless known exceptional circumstances that are affecting a large proportion of the group, in which case rearrange if only by 15 minutes). Make the most of the people present. Assess if the meeting will be able to fulfil its purpose or do something else that is still valuable. If not, then explain and let people go do something useful with their time.

Why? Because it is easy to get caught up on people who are late or absent and to end up taking frustration out on those present, or to have an hour's meeting because that is what was planned in the hope that others will appear or because it was scheduled for an hour. So those who came on time have their time wasted waiting for others or in an ineffectual meeting, and, get berated for the sins of others for their trouble.

5. Find positive things to say about ideas presented and people present

How? Thank people for attending. Look for the positive in what people say, *'Well that is an unusual idea, tell us more about what you are thinking?'* as well as lots of *'good thinking'* *'good idea'* etc.

Why? Because lots of research shows that people generally thrive in a positive atmosphere and creativity improves. A positive atmosphere requires a ratio of positive to negative expressions and emotional responses of about 3:1 or higher. Left to our own devices with our well attuned critical faculties meetings can fail to achieve this tipping point of positivity.