



12 NEW TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

- 1) Ask everyone to arrive five to ten minutes early. This gives everyone time to socialize, obtain coffee, or organize materials before the meeting. It also ensures that everyone is present at the scheduled starting time. Make this part of the agenda.
- 2) Discuss sensitive issues with the key participants before the meeting. Use this as an opportunity to listen and gather information on the issues. From this you will understand the different views, needs, and histories. This information can help you prepare the agenda and conduct the meeting. In addition, you may be able to facilitate solutions or strategies for solutions before the meeting. In either case, the result will be a more efficient meeting.
- 3) Plan small meetings that focus on a single issue. People work more effectively over short periods of time (such as 45 minutes). This also allows you to match experts with issues for more productive meetings.
- 4) Only invite those who can contribute to at least 50% of the items on the agenda. For meetings lasting more than 30 minutes, invite special participants only to the part of the meeting that deals with their contribution.
- 5) Send copies of the minutes to everyone who could have been invited for informational purposes. They can read the minutes in a small fraction of the time that they would have been spent in the meeting.
- 6) When invited to a meeting with a vague (or missing) agenda, ask: what role will I have? Why do you need me? If your impact is minor, refuse to attend and use the time for other work. Meeting planners often attempt to add importance to a meeting by inviting prominent members of the organization.
- 7) If the chairperson seems to have allowed the meeting's intent to drift, ask: "What do you want to achieve?" or "How can we help you?" or "How will we know when we are done working on this?" These questions can help focus the meeting on a goal.
- 8) If a meeting seems out of control, suggest adjourning and reconvening at a later time. This will allow you to clarify goals, prepare strategies, and better understand the issues.
- 9) Reflect the content of key points. This ensures that everyone has the same understanding of the key point. Although this is one of the chairperson's responsibilities, it can be filled by anyone else in the meeting.
- 10) Prepare a list of questions, ideas, suggestions before the meeting. Then you can focus your attention on the discussion in the meeting.
- 11) Watch the listeners instead of the speaker. Their faces and body language will tell you whether they agree or disagree, which can help guide you participation in the discussion.
- 12) Work with a sense of appropriate urgency. Life is finite, and the discussions in meetings should be the same. Plan a time budget and then use it to guide your meeting. Spend extra time only when an issue warrants it.