granted

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS BEGIN WITH A REAL AGENDA

Someone starts a meeting by saying, "Let's talk about the budget."

And you groan because you know what's about to happen next: hours of aimless discussion without resolving anything.

Why?

First, everyone knows that an agenda is the key to an effective meeting.

But an agenda that consists of a list of nouns, such as budget, software, and picnic, is useless. In fact, it might even guarantee that a meeting will be a waste of time.

Here's how to prepare a real agenda that puts you in control of the meeting.

1) Goal. Every real agenda begins with a goal that describes the result wanted at the end of the meeting, such as: find a way to reduce travel costs by 10%. Ideally, this goal should be stated so clearly that someone else could use it to design a meeting that achieved the result.

2) Outcome. This describes the benefit of achieving the goal, and thus tells why you are holding the meeting. For example, the benefit of reducing travel costs might be that you will keep spending within budget.

3) Activities. This provides a blueprint (or set of instructions) for the meeting. Ideally, this contains descriptions of the group activities that will help you and the participants achieve your goal for the meeting. Support this list with an estimated time budget for each activity.

4) Assignments. Tell the participants how to prepare for the meeting (e.g. survey your department for travel costs during the last quarter). Also, tell them what they need to bring (e.g., bring a copy of the budget). Prepared participants make a meeting more efficient and more effective.

5) Logistics. Provide basic information on when and where you will hold the meeting. If participants are coming from other offices, be sure to include directions and maps. In general, provide all the information that people need so that they can perform at their best.

The small amount of time required to prepare a real agenda will help you hold shorter, more effective meetings.