

The normal staff meeting has become a colossal waste of time. No surprise, but a staff meeting is boring and even a dreaded part of the “9 to 5” world. Many consider staff meetings (or team meetings) a practical alternative to work. They feign interest and look at the gatherings as a place to jot down their grocery list or refine their drawing skills. All because there is too little thought invested in the planning or the execution of the meeting.

You can spot the signs of poor meeting management right up front. People turn off their brains; they arrive late or find excuses to skip the meeting. Meetings are held infrequently or are often cancelled or postponed. An effective staff meeting is more than a collection of bodies breathing the same stale air in the same room. It’s about a meeting of minds, full engagement and unlocking the door to self and team improvement.

Turn the staff meeting around and fully engage your team and it can help you boost productivity, reduce the number of problems for you and your team and create a smoother running, more profitable operation. Following are some steps to breathe new life into your staff meeting:

Link the agenda with your mission. Your company’s mission statement sets out your key business objectives and strategies. It ought to feed directly into your meeting agenda. For instance, if one of your strategies is to drive increased sales, then list “Sales” as an item on your agenda. Underneath that topic you could list one-on-one sales calls, telemarketing, follow-ups, trade shows etc. Then discuss each of those individual items. This gives you a yardstick by which to measure progress and to continue to chart your course. The same agenda should flow from week to week.

Create synergy. What is the purpose of bringing your team together? Most people overlook the primary purpose: to inspire the group to achieve mission-based results faster, higher and better. When the feeling in the group is warm and supportive, it’s easier to see that everyone is in it together and the success of the team is linked directly to the success of each individual.

Establish rapport. Effective two-way communication, shared in an environment of trust, is the cornerstone of a great meeting. No strategy or management edict - even yours - should go unchallenged, provided the goal is improvement. Brainstorm new ideas to find ways around potential roadblocks. Encouraging such communication leaves all participants feeling connected and important. The staff should learn from you and you should learn from them.

Think outside the box. Another overlooked objective of effective staff meetings is training. Properly conducted meetings are a forum for continuous improvement. Always look for ways to improve performance by carving out time on the agenda to discuss books, articles and videos aimed at sparking new ideas or improving processes.

Hold meetings regularly. The more frequently meetings are held, the better. In certain business situations, daily meetings are appropriate. In others, weekly meetings will do. Let too many days slip by and you risk sending the wrong message to your team. People will never take a meeting seriously if you don't. If you're constantly postponing meetings, canceling them or calling them at the last minute - that shows a tremendous lack of respect for your team. What could be more important than keeping your team informed, involved and engaged? The ideal time for a staff meeting is Friday afternoon. The workweek is almost done; phone calls and other interruptions dissipate. It's a natural time to put all the actions of that week into perspective. Thus armed, it allows you to set an agenda for the coming week. Alternately, a Monday morning meeting works well to set the agenda for the week. Choose any other day and you risk losing momentum and effectiveness.

Get in and get out. To achieve its objectives, an effective meeting should last just about an hour. No more or the sense of dread starts to sink in. No less because you won't be able to devote the time to accomplish your objectives. Timeliness is critical to running an effective meeting. Start it on time and end when you say you will. That honors the schedules of other members of the team. To enforce timeliness, put a cookie jar in the middle of the table. Start the meeting on time. Anyone who is late by one minute puts in a dollar. Two minutes late and the charge is two dollars and so on. Same on ending time; If you run over one hour, it is one dollar per minute charge for you. When the kitty will support a pizza or sundae party, throw one. A little bit of fun never hurt anybody.

Write up the minutes. The minutes provide the foundation for the next meeting's agenda. At the beginning of the meeting, make sure someone is assigned to write up what happened and what you're planning to make happen; in other words, who's going to do what by when. This role should rotate from team member to team member to enhance participation in the meetings and underscore their responsibility to the team.

Open the books. Always provide people a good fundamental understanding of where the business is going. Don't just provide a cursory statement like, "Business is good" or "Profits are down." Go into detail. The better informed your staff, the better decisions they'll make. Avoid the temptation to launch into long diatribes or sermons that are insulting and patronizing to your team members.

Following some of these simple steps will help you and your team hold more productive meetings and hopefully accomplish your goals together.

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