

## Meetings

### Who needs meetings?

Although meetings can be a great way of communicating the same message to a number of people simultaneously, or of harnessing the thoughts of a group to solve a problem, too many meetings are unproductive, too long, or unnecessary.

### Preparation before the meeting

If you are organising the meeting, you have a much greater responsibility, that of not wasting the time of the other participants.

- ② Do you need to meet? If so, why?
- ② How few people could meet for how little time, how infrequently?
- ② Be clear about your goal and make sure the meeting is directed to it
- ② Invite as few participants as possible
- ② Produce an outline agenda
- ② Request additional agenda items from participants by a given date
- ② Set a timetable for each item, keeping it as short as possible
- ② Arrange items with the most important first
- ② Alternate between heavy and light items
- ② Include breaks for tea / coffee / lunch / stretch / toilet / etc as needed
- ② Produce and distribute the agenda in good time before the meeting
- ② Prepare your items and make sure others do so too
- ② Arrange the venue - the room, the layout, equipment & refreshments
- ② Appoint a minute-taker before the meeting

### During the meeting

Again, if you are chairing the meeting, you have a greater responsibility for making the meeting a productive use of the participants' time.

- ② Ask participants to turn off their mobile phones, laptops, etc
- ② Don't go over the last minutes except for errors & omissions
- ② Add incomplete actions arising to the new minutes
- ② Keep to the time limit you set on each item wherever possible
- ② Keep control of the agenda – don't let people take it off track
- ② Keep the meeting on line; re-focus regularly, summarise often
- ② Cut short items involving only two people that could continue later
- ② Use the flipchart to capture ideas and decisions where appropriate
- ② Ask everyone to contribute – try to reach a balance
- ② Do not let the meeting be interrupted by phone calls or visitors
- ② Make decisions and encourage others to do so too
- ② Don't use meetings for 'public hangings'
- ② Focus on agreeing actions wherever appropriate
- ② Watch for signs that indicate lack of attention, or a need for a break
- ② Do not let 'Any Other Business' be an excuse for people not to prepare; if large items arise defer them to the next meeting
- ② Arrange the date, time, and place of the next meeting

### After the meeting

- ② Produce and distribute the minutes
- ② Carry out actions as agreed

## Tips for all participants

The following points apply to all participants at the meeting:

- ② Consider attending only the part relevant to you
- ② Contribute as appropriate
- ② Listen actively
- ② Stick to agenda times to help the chairperson control the meeting
- ② Don't have a 'hidden agenda'
- ② Take your own notes, it'll help you concentrate and be useful later
- ② You may also need to manage the contributions of the participants

## Managing the people

Some of the different types of people you may encounter in meetings are:

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| ② Over-talkative              | ② Ask direct, closed questions                |
|                               | ② Tell them to give others a chance           |
|                               | ② Interrupt and summarise their ramblings     |
|                               | ② Channel their energy where you want it      |
| ② Silent, shy, disinterested  | ② Ask direct questions they can answer easily |
|                               | ② Use plenty of eye contact                   |
|                               | ② Encourage their thoughts,                   |
|                               | ② Give positive feedback                      |
| ② Arguer, interrupter         | ② Find out the root of their objections       |
|                               | ② Lead into constructive discussion           |
|                               | ② Ask the rest of the group their opinion     |
| ② Subject expert, know-it-all | ② Seek their support on other issues          |
|                               | ② Question the relevance of their lecture     |
|                               | ② Ask the rest of the group their opinion     |
|                               | ② Use the group feeling to help you           |

If you need to, take advantage of a break to have a quiet word with an individual outside the meeting about their contribution or behaviour.

## Minutes

Minutes need not be a record of who said what, but should contain:

- ② What decisions were taken
- ② What actions were agreed
- ② By when and by who the actions are to be completed

**For related topics see Top Tips:**

- **Assertiveness**
- **Influencing**
- **Time Management**