

## Quick Guide

# Leading and Participating in Meetings: why, what, how?

### Why it matters...

Properly run meetings save time, increase motivation and productivity and solve problems. Meetings create new ideas and initiatives. Meetings achieve buy-in. Meetings prevent 'not invented here' syndrome. Meetings diffuse conflict in a way that emails and memos cannot.

Plan, run and follow up meetings properly and they will repay their cost many times over because there is still no substitute for physical face-to-face meetings. Hold meetings to manage teams and situations, and achieve your objectives more quickly and easily. Hold effective meetings to make people happier and more productive.

### What do I need to do?

*If you are **leading** a meeting:*

- Be sure of the objectives of the meeting: what is being discussed, why and what is the desired outcome?
- Prepare an agenda outlining the topic headings in a logical sequence.
- Group urgent items and deal with those first. Put longer items for discussion later on.
- Inform participants in advance of the objective of the meeting and the agenda.
- Circulate useful information in advance of the meeting.
- Plan time limits for each agenda item and for the meeting as a whole.
- Choose a comfortable, convenient venue of an appropriate size where you will not be interrupted.

### How it works



- Make sure that everyone has the chance to air their views on each item.
- Ensure that outcomes of the discussions are agreed and recorded.
- Allocate clear responsibilities and agree timescales for following through on the actions that have been agreed.
- Guide and control the discussion.
- Involve everyone, asking individuals for contributions if necessary, using open questions.
- Offer own opinions after listening to others
- Summarise key points periodically.
- Intervene when the meeting is going off track.
- Use subgroups, round robin discussion, brainstorming, mind mapping or Post-It notes to encourage participation.
- Reflect on how well you led the meeting, get feedback from one or more participants.
- Identify what you should do differently next time.

## What do I need to do?

As a **participant** in a meeting:

- read the agenda and prepare for the meeting in advance.
- Be clear about the objectives and the timing of the meeting.
- Arrive before the appointed time!
- Contribute to the meeting- offer ideas, opinions and information clearly and confidently.
- Keep to the point, don't ramble.
- Listen actively.
- Don't hold mini-meetings on the side
- Let other participants have their say without interrupting.
- Ask other people for their ideas.
- Build on other people's ideas.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Seek and confirm agreement.

## How will I know if I've succeeded?

The test of a well-run meeting is that whatever the subject, people feel afterwards that it took care of their needs, as well as the items on the agenda.

When reflecting on your own performance, as a leader or participant in a meeting, to what extent did you follow the principles outlined on the first page of this guide?

## Tips for managing meetings

- Always have a clear purpose for a meeting, otherwise don't have a meeting.
- Decide the issues for inclusion in the meeting and their relative priority.
- Important matters do not necessarily need to be resolved quickly. Urgent matters generally do not warrant a lot of discussion. Matters that are both urgent and important are clearly serious priorities that need careful planning and management.
- Avoid having Any Other Business in the meeting by circulating a draft agenda in advance and asking for any other items for consideration.
- Any Other Business can be a free-for-all that wastes time and gives rise to new expectations which, if not managed properly, closes the meeting on a negative note.

### Parkinson's Law of Triviality:

“In organisations, a disproportionately large effort is spent on trivial issues rather than important ones.”

See:

<http://www.businessballs.com/quotes.htm#parkinson's-law-of-triviality>