

## The Top 10 Reminders for Running Effective Meetings

It is not always easy to run a good meeting. Meeting leadership requires a balance of discipline and flexibility, diplomacy and determination. Above all, in a well run meeting everyone is treated with respect by everyone else. This includes respect for what each is saying, and respect for issues around people's time.

### 1. Start on time.

If you wait 'just a few more moments' for those who you know are coming but who have not yet arrived, regulars will start to expect that you will wait, and over time the meeting will run later and later. While we all have occasional crises, habitual latecomers are showing disrespect for the meeting process and for the time constraints of others who arrive on time.

### 2. If networking first, give three minutes notice of starting time.

Many meetings have a pre-meeting period of mixing, networking, getting coffee, or other unstructured activities. The transition to structured meeting necessarily takes a few minutes for people to finish their conversations, take their seats and come to order. Giving a few minutes notice of start time prevents this transition from encroaching on meeting business time.

### 3. Keep track of time, or appoint a timer and make sure s/he does the job effectively.

If contributions are to be time-limited, enforce the limit. This is ultimately your responsibility, timer or no timer. If each person is assigned a certain time to speak, and one person regularly ignores that limit, s/he is overstepping boundaries, taking an advantage over those who respect the meeting's structure, and perhaps causing the meeting to run late, so affecting other people's schedules. A timer must time. In some meetings, a timer will start to applaud at the end of the assigned time. In others, a bell or buzzer will be sounded. Lacking these, a teaspoon tapped against a glass or cup makes an appropriate warning sound.

### 4. Be clear about the purpose and policies of your organization.

If policies, rules, traditions, by whatever name, are to be read each week, read them. This may seem repetitive and unnecessary, but repetition creates remembrance. Visits to different meetings where policies are followed and where they are not will usually show clearly that those that follow the policies of their organization are better run, better attended, and more effective in achieving their objectives.

5. Be clear about the structure of the meeting, about who is to do what and when it is to be done.

Be flexible in the face of the unexpected, but firm in the face of casual sloppiness.

6. Know that if you are running the meeting, you are running the meeting.

Do not apologize or act apologetically. Everyone has to have their first experience of running a meeting, and many people feel that they are less empowered than some of the people who are in the meeting. Do not give away your power. For the course of the meeting, YOU are in charge. Take charge.

7. Find your balance.

The foregoing does not mean acting like a tyrant, but it does mean that you are the decision-maker except if and when it is the function of another officer to take over. Find a combination of businesslike but not-ogre like demeanor that is appropriate for the situation and for you personally.

8. Acknowledge interruptions, know that whether they are dealt with now or after current business is your decision, and stand firm on it.

Some people have little tolerance for delay of gratification, and expect that their issues should be dealt with immediately. They can be acknowledged, and reassured that there will be a time for them, without allowing the order of business to be disrupted.

9. Do not tolerate side-talking.

For some reason, some people believe that when they speak to their neighbor during a meeting, no one else can hear them. In fact, this behavior is both rude to whomever is legitimately speaking at the time, and is distracting to other participants in the meeting. It is the job of the person presiding over the meeting - not necessarily the person who is speaking at the time - to stop this. Examples of appropriate comments at such a time include, "One meeting at a time, please." "If this is urgent, can you take it outside, please?" "No side-taking allowed." Another response can be for the speaker to stop speaking and simply look at the offenders while waiting for the side-talking to end before resuming the meeting's official business.

10. End on time.

This is a matter of basic courtesy to those who may have other events scheduled based on the planned ending time of the meeting. On rare occasions, under exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to run late. This should not become a habit. If participants commit to a certain time for the meeting, they should be able to count on it.