

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: MEET RIGHT OR DON'T MEET

In our years of experience shadowing leaders and working with executive teams, we have seen many substandard meetings. The result? Lost opportunity (the executive who did not speak up, leaving her colleagues in the dark as to her position), diminished credibility (the director who tried to lead a meeting after a few too many at lunch), missed critical input (the agenda-less meeting where the right people did not show up because they did not know they should be there), and wasted time (the recaps for the late attendees; e.g., “Joe, in the 15 minutes before you got here, we.....”). No one feels good about meetings like these.

One of the things we executive coaches do is make the apparent obvious. It is obvious that certain behaviors result in vital, productive meetings. It is equally apparent that leaders often behave in ways that render meetings unnecessary and fruitless. You have been in those meetings and no doubt you do not want to be in another one.

There are simple, basic guidelines that can make the difference between a meeting attendee thinking, “I would rather be doing something (anything) else,” and, “I am so glad this meeting took place and that I was present.” The latter are meetings where attendees walk out feeling, “This meeting was necessary; it accomplished its goals. It was thought-provoking and taught me something new. I know what I have to do differently, how to work with my colleagues, or where to go for collaboration.”

We suggest these tips as very basic meeting guidelines.

1. **Have an agenda.** This is a simple standard; however, even senior people need to be reminded of its usefulness. It is obvious that having an agenda allows the right people to be present and all attendees to be prepared.
2. **Use an agenda defender** to keep the meeting on time and on track. It is just human nature; people will tend to wander off onto their own path sometimes.
3. **Be prepared. Be on time.** This is about both productivity and respect.
4. **Always review organizational Vision, Mission, and Goals.** This reinforces HOW and WHY you are doing what you are doing.
5. **Listen. Engage. Clarify.** Take part as a sentient, involved party, not as a bump on a log.
6. **Always review agreements and accountabilities** at the end of the meeting. This is where the rubber hits the road. OUTCOMES—if there aren't any, there probably should not have been a meeting. See the Rumsfeld reference below.
7. **Avoid:** Passing notes; giggling or displaying inappropriate body language; texting; using the phone as a calculator, unless everyone knows that is what you are doing.
8. **Think:** Respect, productivity, relationships, credibility, engagement.

Good meeting principles are not just about good manners; they are the essential oil to the organizational machinery. Meetings that operate well result in effective decisions, successful implementation, and clear accountability. The more you do it right, the more high-performance the team becomes, and the more valuable are the outcomes.

How is meeting behavior affecting the worth of the time spent in meetings in your organization? What behaviors would you add to the list above for your meetings?

For more tips information, see [Donald Rumsfeld's Rules for Successful Meetings](#) article for the Wall Street Journal (May 10, 2013).