LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: 5 RULES TO FOLLOW FOR EFFECTIVE SENIOR TEAM MEETINGS

Effective leaders have the ability to lead a meeting well. Yet many who do lead meetings often forget to follow five simple rules - rules we have seen in our executive coaching practice across many different types of organizations that make for more impactful meetings.

Let’s take the case of Adam who set out to meet with his senior team in a regular operations review meeting. The team had not set ground rules, and Adam felt that they had conducted this type of meeting so many times, an agenda was not needed on that day. Jordan arrived late; Emily stepped out to take a phone call; Stu was texting someone; and three-quarters of the allotted time for the call was used up on just one topic. Lack of ground rules created a lackluster environment where one person dominated the conversation, and issues that should have been addressed were not discussed. People departed the meeting unclear about who was accountable for what. In short, very little was achieved, and much distrust and frustration was created.

Successful meetings are much more likely to occur, if you:

1. Set a clear agenda and stick to it.
   - Not all senior teams routinely use clear agendas. Sometimes the agendas are not followed or they are ambiguous. You know what happens without a definite agenda:
     - Preparation is ineffective.
     - Important issues get derailed and taken off track.
     - Time is wasted due to lack of focus.
   - A best practice of some teams is to use an “agenda defender” to make sure the pace of the meeting and discussions are appropriate and all important agenda items are addressed.

2. Establish and hold people accountable to “ground rules” or “team agreements” for positive, productive behavior in the meeting.
   - These are agreed-upon behaviors about how team members will treat each other, what is allowed in the meeting and what violates the team or organizational culture. For example: stay off electronic devices; listen—don’t judge; and agreements made inside the room are commitments outside the room. Team agreements can be very simple and brief, as in: Stick to the agenda. Stick to the allocated time. Stick to the decisions made.
   - Creating such agreements can be a very healthy exercise to provide an arena for surfacing previously unspoken issues, elephants in the room, and other topics that may seem “too hot to touch.”
3. Seek contributions from all parties, not just the strong personalities.
   - Remember that some people need to be prompted, invited, and called upon.

4. Address issues when they occur rather than letting them fester.
   - The practice of candor and transparency within the meeting should carry over outside the meeting. Using the meeting as a “practice lab” can help increase the level of candor across the organization and “train” people to better participate in difficult conversations. If you need to address an issue with another team member, make it a point to meet with that person face-to-face—as many times as it takes.

5. Make clear that, while good team dynamics are important in the meeting, they matter as much if not more out in the organization where leaders lead every day and act as role models for others.
   - Whatever ground rules are set, they do not cease being in effect at the exit door of the meeting room.

*Have you been in meetings like Adam’s and if so did it get turned around? How? What is your framework for successful meetings?*