Effective Meetings:

**Things to Consider When Preparing for Your Meetings**

The following list suggests the multitude of considerations relevant to meetings. For a brief, informal meeting, only a handful of these items need to be addressed. For a meeting with major consequences for your organization, all or most may need your careful attention.

**Before Your Meetings**

- Be sure you're clear on the stated goal.
- Be sure all meeting participants are clear on the stated goal.
- Establish a specific standard by which you will measure success or failure.
- Determine what your personal goal is with the group as a whole and with each particular participant.
- Reduce the number of people to only those necessary to accomplish the goal.
- Assess your basic relationship to your meeting partner or partners: superior, peer or subordinate. Evaluate their likely personal interests and needs.
- Reduce the number of issues and tasks to only those necessary to accomplish the goal.
- Prepare more. Envision the meeting as you would like it to take place, and determine what must be done in the way of further specific preparation to make your desired vision a reality.
- Establish a meeting environment and theater (including style, location, room size and seating) consistent with your goal.
- Consult with any participants or others whose cooperation is necessary in order to meet the goal.
- Establish a clear and appropriately detailed agenda, and circulate it and other written materials in advance.
- Do your homework, and go at least one step beyond the expectations of your meeting partners.
- Form a tentative judgment on all issues.
- Count the votes for issues critical to you.
- Be aware of the particular customs, rules and etiquette for the meeting.


Effective Meetings:

10 Commandments of Meeting

You've been sitting in the meeting for 93 minutes. It feels like 93 days. It was supposed to last an hour, max, but the Senior VP is in the room, and the point of the session was to discuss his pet project, and no one wants to be the first to crack. Everyone else is busy making gratuitous points designed to flatter Mr. Big. You’re entertaining fantasies about throwing a cream pie, or worse, at the blowhard who just won’t stop talking about how successful the project will be. You know it’s doomed to fail; it’s the high-tech equivalent of selling ice to the Inuit.

You’re asking yourself, who's in charge here? How did all these reasonably well-intentioned people get so far out of whack? And, more to the point, how can this juggernaut be stopped?

Since mass laryngitis is not an option, you need the Ten Commandments of Meetings. Moreover, you need to post them prominently in meeting rooms so that everyone can begin to follow them—especially the leader. Remember that even Moses had trouble with his unruly flock from time to time, so be prepared for the occasional outburst of the modern corporate version of Baal worship.

I  Thou Shalt Always Know What Time It Is

The clock rules in meetings. Out of respect for the commitment and sanity of everyone who attends, meetings should never run over the time allotted. Especially regularly scheduled meetings. If the session gets bogged down in an issue, table it for another meeting. If the meeting must conclude by taking an action or decision, then schedule it accordingly. Tell all the participants before the meeting starts that it will go as long as necessary to reach the stated conclusion. Don’t mislead people by minimizing the amount of work involved; that kind of trickery will only come back to haunt you.

II  Thou Shalt Not Forget the Main Reason for Meetings

The only good reason to have meetings is to do something together that you can't do better alone. In business, meetings have three primary purposes: communicating, administering, and deciding. Of these, the first and last are most worthwhile. But the focus of all three kinds of meetings should be action. They should either be communicating the intention to take an action or the results of action that has been taken, administering a plan of action, or deciding among alternative actions. If you find yourself calling meetings – or going to them – that have some other purpose, you're wasting your time. And everyone else’s. Find something else to do.
Thou Shalt Remember the Golden Rule of Meetings:  
Praise in Public, Criticize in Private

Shut off public criticism when it arises. It's extremely destructive to morale and should be prevented. Indeed, much misery could be avoided in the business world if all members of the corporate community would remember a simple fact: if they are working for the same employer, then they are all on the same team. Corporate politics we will always have with us, but that doesn’t mean that we have to accept them tamely. Help your vocally critical teammates by making it clear, in advance of each meeting, who is in charge, how long the meeting will last, and what the point of the meeting is. Then deal with attempts to take the meeting in other, more vicious directions as simple misunderstandings of the agreed-upon ground rules. Politely but firmly steer the meeting back to the right terrain.

Thou Shalt Not Convene Meetings Outside of Normal Business Hours

Of course there are times when this commandment must be broken, but they should be reserved for real emergencies. People who schedule meetings for evenings and weekends are merely advertising the embarrassing fact that they have no life - and they're expecting others to give up theirs. That kind of person should not be allowed to run anything, much less part of a modern corporation, because they lack the basic humanity to do a good job. Surviving in the fast-moving, devil-take-the-hindmost business world of today requires good peripheral vision as well as keen understanding of the work involved. Those without the necessary life balance can't possibly understand that world they're in or see around the next business corner.

Thou Shalt Not Use Group Pressure to Logroll Conclusions

It is simply wrong to use meetings to pressure people into agreeing to actions or ideas that they know to be immoral or illegal in order to promote the business of the corporation. Group pressure is a powerful force, especially where jobs are at stake. Don't misuse it to get people to stray from the straight and narrow, or bend the rules, or set the quotas dangerously high, or cut corners on quality, or any one of a thousand such activities that go on every day in misguided organizations everywhere. Your corporation has a set of values. If it doesn't include adherence to a code of ethics and the rule of law, change the values or find values or find somewhere else to work.

Thou Shalt Not Use Meetings to Destroy Others' Careers

There is enough room in every meeting for a disagreement without making it personal or destructive. More than that, it's wrong – and politically unwise. Modern corporate life has become so ephemeral and its denizens so transient that your past is bound to come back and face you again, and sooner rather than later. A petty triumph at someone else's expense at one job may well prove seriously embarrassing at your next job. Resist the temptation. Curiously, the unstable nature of today's workplace has encouraged people to take the opposite attitude. The thinking seems to run, "I'll never see these people again, so why not cut loose?" But the opposite
is almost certainly true.

VII Thou Shalt Keep the Personal and the Corporate Distinct
There’s nothing wrong with having friends at work. But meetings are not for social calls. To be sure, a certain amount of socializing at the beginnings and endings of meetings is part of the grease that keeps the well-oiled corporate machine running smoothly. But the balance should be clearly kept on the side of business. Too much socializing will lead to resentment among the others at the meeting who are not part of the party. More than that, it’s inefficient, bad for business, and corrosive for your soul. You need to have a life outside the corporate one. If you find that all your socializing is taking place in business meetings, it’s time to change a few things.

VIII Thou Shalt Remember that the Best Model for Meetings Is Democracy, Not Monarchy
Resist the temptation to railroad your fellow participants into a decision you want. You need to lead by moral persuasion, not by virtue of your title. Brute force is not the appropriate mode for meetings, though jujitsu sometimes is. As a leader, you should always strive to understand the sense of the meeting. If you want to issue edicts, publish them in the media available to you. You don’t need a meeting to announce a new course of proceeding that is not up for discussion. And watch out for other participants in the meeting trying to take control. Hijacking a meeting is a cherished corporate game, but a nasty one. It’s your job as a leader to prevent that from happening.

IX Thou Shalt Always Prepare a Clear Agenda and Circulate It Beforehand
It is more than courtesy – it is good efficient business practice to think hard about the purpose, nature and structure of a meeting before it takes place. These thoughts should be codified in the form of an agenda and circulated to all participants well in advance of the meeting. Time enough, at any rate, for the participants to prepare whatever they need to in the way of reports, plans, proposals, or the like. Far too often, people who call meetings grossly underestimate the amount of preparation required of the participants.

X Thou Shalt Terminate a Regularly Scheduled Meeting When Its Purpose for Being No Longer Exists
If you can no longer clearly state the reason for having a regular meeting, it’s time to kill it. Purposes change, and when the meeting has lost its reason fortaking place, be the first one to put an end to it. All periodic meetings should have a stock-taking every few sessions to determine if the meeting still has a purpose. It’s just one way to fight corporate bloat and bureaucratic encrustation. Of course, for this discipline to work, you must have decided what the regular meeting was for when it was begun. Goal-setting is just as important in meetings as it is in the rest of corporate life.

The only meetings that people wish had run longer are those magical ones that take place when
lovers first set eyes upon one another. Don't make the mistake of thinking that your business meeting is that thrilling. Keep its timing, purpose, and tone in perspective. Live to meet another day.

The Meeting Organizer:

✔ state that the meeting will begin promptly at the scheduled time and that all participants should be on time
✔ send a reminder e-mail thirty minutes before the meeting begins and encourage meeting participants to arrive on time
✔ ensure that you begin the meeting at the scheduled time. If you've encouraged others to be prompt, don't embarrass yourself by showing up late.

✔ close the meeting room doors at the scheduled time. There's nothing like late attendees to disrupt the flow of a meeting! Consider posting a note outside the door stating the meeting's time. This may seem harsh, but it clearly communicates how serious you are about keeping your meetings on time. If the tardy participants don't consider your meeting important enough to arrive on time, perhaps they shouldn't have committed to attend at all.

✔ if your meeting starts a little late, you should still finish the meeting at the scheduled time. It's inconsiderate to assume the participants' schedules revolve around your meeting, so wrap up the meeting when you promised.

✔ consider creating a "latecomer jar" to which meeting participants must contribute one dollar for each minute they arrive late to meetings. At the end of the week, you can buy muffins or donuts for everyone who attended the meeting... courtesy of the latecomers!