

## Why Have a Meeting?

The most common reason to have a meeting is to discuss something face to face. It could be a new idea, a new opportunity, a problem, to brainstorm something, reach a decision about something or any number of things. But it all comes down to discussion and face to face interaction.

A lot of work communication is done via the phone, email, post, newsletters, company websites, intranets and extranets. These methods of communication have made life easier and communication quicker in a lot of respects.

However, they are they still cannot replace a face to face meeting. Discussing something face to face allows you to not only hear what is being spoken; giving you access to clues hidden in the speaker's tone of voice but it also allows you to see the speaker. The observation of body language and facial muscles is very important as it allows you to read the person's reaction to what you are saying as well as what they actually think about what they themselves are saying.

Only 7% of communication is spoken. The other 93% is made up of tone (38%) and body language (55%). So although facts and figures are easily communicated via email, letter or phone, an actual discussion or negotiation is best handled where you can see the other person and therefore are able to see for yourself what their tone and body have to say on the matter.

### Making the Most of Your Meeting

Keep in mind the primary reasons to have a meeting at all are:

- To gather and impart information;
- To exchange ideas, views, opinions and suggestions;
- To discuss options;
- To solve problems;
- To make decisions;
- To devise plans.

If these are not the main aims of the meeting, perhaps a meeting isn't really necessary? Meetings can be very successful, making those involved feel part of a team; or they can be disastrous, leaving everyone present feeling confused and frustrated.

To make the most of your meeting it is important to put some thought into what the meeting is supposed to accomplish, who should attend, what should be discussed, where the best place to have it is, and when would be the most convenient date and time.

Having decided on the basics, equally important is how the meeting is facilitated. If you are the chair ensure that you arrive in plenty of time. Greet everyone warmly and ensure that everyone is comfortable and able to pay attention without distractions.

Use your opening remarks to set the tone of the meeting, establish the purpose and then review the agenda. Give a short overview of each topic and what you need to achieve. For example, for the first item on the agenda does a decision have to be taken or are you just looking to brainstorm?

During the meeting it is important to pay attention to the structure of items. For example, a step by step approach to problem solving encourages people to develop and evaluate alternative solutions. Without this, the meeting can dissolve into a free for all with the strongest voice dominating; or no ideas being generated; or the item being put on hold until the next meeting.

It's the facilitator's job to guide the discussion, sometimes re-stating what has been discussed so everyone is on the same page. It is also up to the chair to keep control of the meeting, encourage open discussion and discourage disruptive or negative behavior. It is your job to get people to contribute effectively and to encourage diverse points of view.

At the end of the meeting summarize the topics discussed, actions agreed and those responsible. Thank everyone for coming and, if necessary, agree on the next meeting date. Meeting minutes are very helpful as a reminder to everyone of what happened during the meeting and what is meant to be done now, by whom and by what date. It is good practice to circulate the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting has taken place. At the very least, send a brief communication about what tasks were assigned and what should be completed prior to the next meeting.

Source: <http://www.meetings.org/meeting1.htm>