



ART OF CHAIRING MEETINGS

Jane Sunley gives advice about holding a successful meeting.

Secretary At Work: Reviewed February 2012

In January, four secretary/managers had a stimulating meeting about the year just past and the one ahead. Then they all went back to work and forgot about it. Wouldn't happen? It does, all the time. Typically, managers spend around 40% of their time in meetings and good meetings are the best way to share knowledge and generate progress. Yet according to the Institute of Directors, 83% of people who go to meetings worry about them drifting off the subject and 74% question their effectiveness.

If outputs and action plans aren't clear there's no point having the meeting in the first place. Have you ever been to a meeting that left you feeling dissatisfied, tired, demotivated, frustrated? It may be that the meeting was not necessary in the first place; or maybe you did not need to be there; maybe things dragged on too long, were unfocused, out of control; perhaps people had not prepared and you felt they had wasted your time – maybe you were the one doing the time wasting?

Whether you are meeting with an individual, a committee, your team, a group of colleagues or the whole company it's important to use the time well and make sure there are outputs as well as inputs. Here's how:

Preparation:

- ☞ Is the meeting really necessary?
- ☞ Who needs to be there?
- ☞ When, where and for how long?
- ☞ Self prepare – what do I want the outcomes to be? How can you influence the meeting? Plan your approach.
- ☞ Circulate a draft agenda or pick up the phone / email and communicate your suggestions, including any relevant additions.

Agenda: When planning the agenda think about:

- ☞ What you want out of the meeting
- ☞ the scope of the discussion so you keep on track
- ☞ a logical order for the items to be covered
- ☞ whether you will cover difficult points first or start with the easy or more pleasant matters

- ☛ how you will deal with difficult items – would they be better dealt with outside the meeting? Do you need to do a bit of ‘lobbying’ first?
- ☛ the times allocated to each and how flexible you will be
- ☛ how to manage the meeting accordingly
- ☛ who will be there, what their needs might be
- ☛ what decisions might need to be taken – what are possible options?
- ☛ Possible action plans and outcomes

12 Golden Rules for Chairing a Meeting:

1. Make sure the room is comfortable, warm enough and well ventilated, that there is plenty of water on hand and that you allow for breaks.
2. Gain rapport – warm up the meeting by discussing something general that everyone can join in with or introduce a warm up exercise
3. Be in control
4. Be assertive
5. Make an impact – positive, strong, good body language
6. Set the tone, rules and agenda
7. Be consistent and fair – with everyone
8. Guide the discussion rather than dominating it – the chair is the facilitator not the chief contributor
9. Listen and ask the right questions
10. Manage the time
11. Involve everyone and bring in those who may be holding back (they are often the thinkers in the group and can make the best contributions)
12. Use tact and diplomacy

Suggestion: Where possible rotate the chair so that everyone has a chance to run a meeting.

Putting your case forward:

- ☛ State your case
- ☛ Give reasons
- ☛ Give an example
- ☛ Restate your position

For example:

I'd like to introduce some guest beers into our bar. I can make 5% more margin on them and some of the regulars have been asking about them. A friend's bar in his Golf Club did this and increased the bar takings considerably. So I'd really like to give guest beers a go at this Golf Club.

Dealing with conflict:

- ☛ Keep calm, cool and in control
- ☛ Keep to business – avoid personal comments – use ‘I feel...’ instead of ‘you...’

- 👉 Keep to the facts and issues in hand
- 👉 If you don't understand, ask
- 👉 Be open to feedback and use it positively
- 👉 Respect the other point of view – even if you don't agree with it
- 👉 Take a break if necessary
- 👉 If you really can't agree discuss with an impartial third party
- 👉 Be prepared to compromise

Problem solving:

- 👉 Define the issue (problem)
- 👉 Check the facts
- 👉 Define the desired outcomes
- 👉 Identify alternatives
- 👉 Examine possible consequences
- 👉 Choose your solution and do it
- 👉 Check whether you achieved the goals and act accordingly

Dealing with different types:

- 👉 Mr Stropky: let him have his say, sum up his point of view for the group and ask for feedback
- 👉 Mr Positive: use him to reinforce points and contribute throughout
- 👉 Mrs Know-All: Let the group comment on her theories
- 👉 Miss Chatty: Interrupt tactfully – use time limitations as an excuse to move on. Summarise her points.
- 👉 Mr Bashful: Ask him about something he knows to increase self-confidence. Give credit for his contributions.
- 👉 Miss Distracted: Ask her about her experience and for help to solve the issues
- 👉 Mr Detail: Ask for the overview and then for specific detail only as it's needed
- 👉 Mrs Questioner: Pass her questions back to the group or ask her to answer her own question.

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