HOW TO RUN AN EFFECTIVE MEETING - THE COMPLETE RUNDOWN

Gouldian Finch | September 10, 2018   Business

We all know that meetings are a waste of time, right?

Unless, of course, they are conducted in a way that makes them effective meetings.

Ok, maybe that first statement wasn't not entirely true, but what is true is that somewhere around a third of all meetings are rated as "unproductive", according to a Verizon Conferencing study.

However, with all of the collaborative and decision making capabilities meetings provide, could it just be that certain managers are not aware of *how* to run an effective meeting?

With meetings being a commonality across almost every profession, this news should be slightly alarming, as it puts your valuable time at stake. That's why effective meetings are so important.

From Skype meetings, to quarterly meetings, to one-on-one meetings, and so on - meetings come with the territory when working in the professional world. In fact, the typical professional attends more than 60 meetings per month! As such, effective meetings are vital to a successful enterprise.

Generally speaking, time wasted in meetings has more to do with a meeting's **potential for inefficacy** if run incorrectly. Luckily though, many of the problems related to ineffective meetings are avoidable altogether. Therein, let's avoid inefficacy by delving into **how to run an effective meeting.**

Effective meetings vs. efficient meetings

Before we begin, let's clarify the difference between an **efficient meeting** and an **effective meeting**, as there is the potential for confusion between the two.

An *efficient meeting* is one that starts on time, stays on track, and ends on time. Efficient meetings typically involve the minimum amount of attendees necessary and use up as little time as possible. While these meeting qualities sound great on the surface, conducting meetings efficiently is only half the battle.

An *effective meeting*, on the other hand, takes on all the same qualities as an efficient meeting and uses them to achieve **tangible results**. Ideally, an effective meeting will provide an opportunity for [project collaboration](#) and

alignment between teams and an opportunity to collaborate on a given topic. When a meeting is effective, all attendees are hand selected and are present for a reason (more on that below). Most importantly, effective meetings offer teams the opportunity to have an open discussion about the topic at hand. This type of meeting is essential for ensuring that the collective vision is clear and everyone is on the same page as far as the goals that need to be achieved.

What makes a meeting effective?

So what exactly is an effective meeting made of? We'll outline some key characteristics of an effective meeting below.

An effective meeting has a purpose

Those that complain that they are [wasting time in meetings](#) may have a point. When a meeting is run ineffectively, every moment that they spend in a meeting is time that they could otherwise spend in a productive manner. Considering the glut of meetings some employees are subject to, the amount of available productive time could be waning. Therefore, if time is money, then the meeting had better be worth it.

The solution? Make sure every meeting has a purpose.

Clearly stated, meetings without purpose are not just a waste of the employees' time, but also that of the company's. Effective meetings, on the other hand, are arranged with specific action items in mind and take only the necessary amount of time to do it.

Moreover, assess the situation and decide whether a meeting is actually necessary for the topic being discussed.

In many cases, you will find that a discussion over email will suffice.

Discussions are kept on-track in an effective meeting

A discussion about the weekend, a tangential story, an overemphasis on the details - it is easy for conversations within meetings to get off track. Moreover, we are all aware of how frustrating it can be when a meeting runs over its scheduled time.

Even in the most effective of meetings, it takes a strong leader to ensure that the conversation stays focused and productive. **When running an effective meeting, your best bet will be to have pre-planned strategies in place, should the discussion begin to deviate.**

For instance, if the conversation veers too deep into the details of a given agenda item, suggest to the attendees that such matters can be brought up again at the end of the meeting, if time permits, or else at a later designated time – or even over email. By doing so, the discussion is kept productive, with an eye on fulfilling the meeting's purpose.

Effective meetings generate tangible results

As we mentioned earlier, the difference between an *efficient meeting* and an *effective meeting* is a fine one. The key difference lies in the end result. Put plainly, the most effective meetings have the results to back them up. Sure, any meeting, effective or no, can yield some sort of output. The distinction, therefore, comes in the form of tangibility or actionability.

The most effective meetings build up to their results. With a specific goal in mind, a pre-selected team came together to discuss a topic or series of topics, and came away successful. This may come in a variety of forms, but at the end of the

day, effective meetings make the time spent on them worth it.

How can I prepare for an effective meeting?

Now that we know what makes for an effective meeting, let's take a look at how to prepare for one.

Set a goal

In the planning stages of an effective meeting, your constant refrain should be "Is this necessary?" In short, everything done in an effective meeting should be in pursuit of the broader goal. Rather than considering whether the meeting's goal indicates a waste of time, instead question the goal's effectiveness.

Therein, take a moment to ponder the cost-benefit balance of the meeting's intended purpose. Is the desired outcome worth the sacrifice of productive time, on the part of the employees? If the answer is no, then continue to fine-tune your goals until the answer is a yes. Otherwise, consider whether another method of communication, say video conferencing for example, would be a better decision.

Create and share a meeting agenda

Any good plan, whether it be a travel itinerary or meeting agenda, has to be more than a list of ideals and goals. This is where a well-planned agenda comes into play. Any effective meeting has one, and it lists, point-by-point, sometimes down to the minute, how the meeting will flow. Without it, items can be forgotten, time can run out, and nothing may be achieved. This is where tools like the agenda sharing function on the [myViewBoard online whiteboard](#) platform can play a helpful role.

However, creating an effective meeting agenda is only the half of it – you'll want to also ensure that all relevant attendees are on the same page. By sharing the agenda ahead of the meeting, with sufficient time, employees will have the opportunity to get mentally prepared and also to chime in with any feedback.

Determine topics

When figuring out how to run an effective meeting, the determination of topics, discussion-based or otherwise, is of critical importance. This is fundamentally tied to the formation of goals and an effective agenda. Even with the

greatest goals in the world, an ill-thought-out topic will lead the meeting nowhere.

Therefore, when determining topics, make an effort to be as detailed and thorough as possible. The added context and detail will directly lead to better discussions and a more precise outcome, thus making your life easier down the line.

How can I successfully run an effective meeting?

Assuming that you took our advice in the previous section and did some pre planning for your meeting, we'll delve into how to run an effective meeting when the time comes.

Prepare for the greatest possible attendance

If you're running a meeting at 4:30 pm on a Friday afternoon, there's a high likelihood that attendance will be less than optimal. Those that want to plan an effective meeting, however, will do everything in their power to ensure that their attendance numbers are as high as possible. Based on this example, setting a meeting at say 10 am on a Tuesday would be the better option. In that vein, more people at a meeting equals more minds geared toward the issues at hand and a better chance at producing the most effective results.

Beyond the number of attendees, however, lies the importance of having the **right** attendees. While there's nothing wrong with having six low-level employees work through an agenda, the potential for actionable results is much greater when members of upper management are also

present. Therefore, when selecting a time and date for a meeting, ensure that it not only guarantees an optimal number of people but also accommodates the schedules of those who hold sway.

Limit the use of unnecessary devices

Smartphones, laptops, and tablets make our lives more convenient than ever before, but they can also be a massive distraction when not used correctly. Sure, being in an hour-long meeting might not be very appealing, but it does a disservice to all involved if you're spending that time browsing the internet rather than engaging in a collaborative discussion.

Having a product that connects all the devices in the meeting room will be your greatest ally. The ViewSonic ViewBoard is an example of a collaboration display that does just that and helps you manage necessary devices. Features such as mirroring and screen sharing help to keep attention undivided, resulting in more efficient and more effective meetings. Having devices connected in this manner also has the potential to reduce the time spent in meetings by avoiding the time wasted switching between users and devices. You can read on about collaborative meeting spaces to keep up to date with some of the current meeting trends and technologies.

Encourage input from all sources

Nothing says "effective meeting" quite like a great discussion and/or brainstorming session involving all those who are present. Even 92% of meeting attendees agree that the most important part of a meeting is the opportunity to participate, according to this Verizon study.

Therefore, as someone running an effective meeting, it's your responsibility to encourage input from all sources, particularly quiet participants. This will help to encourage possible out-of-the-box or dissenting opinions. After all,

only by examining a topic from all sides can an effective solution truly be found.

That being said, creating an environment where these minority voices can be heard is not necessarily the easiest of tasks. For the meeting coordinator, this entails fostering a culture of trust and inclusivity. In that regard, the coordinator must lead by example, and demonstrate that a meeting requires participation and a range of perspectives in order to be effective.

After an effective meeting, what's next?

Once a meeting has come to a close, the time spent and the results produced do not simply fade into the void. In order for effective meetings to remain so, proper steps need to be taken.

First and foremost, preferably before the meeting has even begun, an attendee will have been nominated as the meeting's note taker. At the close of the meeting, said attendee should share those notes with everyone else. Technology such as myViewBoard's cloud-based online whiteboard platform was developed with functionality in

mind. Connection to cloud storage such as Google Drive, Dropbox, and more, ensures that all involved are on the same page going forward, thus making follow-ups later on an easier endeavor.

Additionally, in pursuit of having run an effective meeting, as a meeting organizer you should engage in a debrief following the meeting's conclusion. Therein, take the time to properly evaluate what went well and what did not. More to the point, consider how well the meeting's goals were reached, and how you can do so in a more effective manner in later instances.

Once you've taken your own inventory, it's a good idea to do the same for those who were in attendance. Just as feedback is such an important aspect of an effective meeting, the same is true for post-meeting evaluation. This is especially important if the meeting is of an ongoing series, rather than just a one-off, as it allows for adjustment and better planning in later iterations.

Although this feedback can occur either at the immediate closure of the meeting or sometime thereafter, the inherent line of questioning remains the same. By and large, after an effective meeting, the goal is to maintain efficacy and continue to yield actionable results and feedback.

Below is a set of questions you can run through to carry out your post-meeting assessment and give you some more insight of what can be improved the next time around. You can also ask these questions to your attendees to get some more insight into this topic:

Post-meeting feedback questions:

- Did the meeting produce actionable results?
- Did all attendees feel like they were able to provide input?
- Was the agenda an accurate reflection of what was covered?

- Was the central topic and goal well thought out, detailed, and clear?
- Did attendance feel optimal? Who should be included next time?

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