



MEETINGS – Mud Bogging or Bobsledding?



What comes to mind when I say meetings?

Is it, "Ughhh, we have so many meetings and they just suck up all our time", or "Our meetings feel like driving through a mud bog; they drag on and it takes forever to get to a point or agree on anything!" Or are your meetings engaging, productive and helpful to your work? Do you speed through them taking the twists and turns with organizational savvy like bobsledders expertly maneuvering the track?

Well, if it's more of the first, then let me help you become more like bobsledders!

I often hear cries of "no more meetings, **PLEASE!**". When I



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This May 9th, I'm pleased to present "Everything is Negotiable - Do it Skillfully!" at the **2018 Maine Women's Conference in Portland Maine.**

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The mission of the Maine Women's Conference is to draw women together to connect, educate, inspire, and empower one another to assume new and expanded roles in the workforce, our lives and

examine what a team is doing, I often find that the original purpose of the meeting has been lost along the way and their meetings no longer give them what they need. A lot of regular staff meetings become long lists of reports and sharing information in ineffective ways. Nobody wants to sit in a meeting that is neither worth their while nor helpful in doing their job.

Make meetings come alive and proceed at a good pace with these steps:

1. Start with the end in mind
2. Use the right process for the outcome you want
3. Have an agenda with times and a time-keeper
4. Have a note-taker who does the minutes
5. Use ground rules
6. Consider a stand-up style for check-in type meetings
7. Never leave without defining and agreeing on NEXT STEPS

Let me put some meat on those bones:

1. Start with the end in mind. What is the purpose of the meeting? Is it to share information? If so, consider number 6 below. There are several general purposes for meetings:

- Gathering data
- Analyzing data
- Generating ideas
- Narrowing choices
- Providing focus
- Making a decision
- Action planning

Unless you have relatively simple issues, you cannot do all these things for each agenda item in one meeting! That's an assumption that can lead down a meandering road taking you in the wrong direction via the discussion highway of circles that lead nowhere. Each of the above purposes can

communities.

Be sure to grab your ticket early - this is an event you're not going to want to miss!

PREPARATION is a **key** to efficient meetings.

Have you done your part to be prepared?

Did you review the agenda and think about what you need to bring, what ideas you can come with, what documents you might want to share, what questions should be asked or answered before moving forward?

What can you do to help move the agenda along smoothly?

The Five P's of EFFECTIVE Meetings:



1. Preparation – Agenda, handouts, charts, data, previous minutes, chart paper and markers or white board, computer equipment, etc.

be part of the same issue, but it's important to take first things first. Consider the following:

- Are you at the stage that you need to gather data and just understand something before you can do anything?
- Are you trying to make a decision without having the necessary information or without taking time to analyze the information you do have?
- Are you trying to decide too quickly without considering the pros and cons of multiple options?

Often times, people will try to run an issue through all these stages in one meeting and the reason the discussion seems to go in circles is that you're trying to gather data, analyze it, brainstorm options, look at pros and cons and make a decision all in the same discussion. Often, that is too much too fast and doesn't end well.

What's the purpose of this meeting? At what stage are you? How many of these stages can you legitimately go through in the amount of time you have for this meeting? Consider breaking it up. Whatever you decide, be sure that everyone understands the purpose and what outcome you are working towards. Otherwise, everyone may have different expectations and be critical that the meeting didn't meet their expectations. If the purpose and expectations are clear to everyone, you are much better positioned for success.

2. Use the right process for the outcome you want. Be productive by deciding what you want to accomplish in this meeting, announce it, commit to it with the agenda and then have the right process to actually get it done. What do I mean by the right process? In the world of organizational development work, which is what we, at KCS specialize in, there are a wide variety of processes for each one of the purposes I specified above. We can help you design a meeting with a process or processes for the outcome you're trying to achieve. There's often simpler,

2. People – Are all the people you need invited

3. Purpose – Why are you meeting? What is the need and do the participants all understand the need and the background leading to the meeting or the agenda items?

4. Product – What do you specifically want to have at the end of the meeting? Is it a decision, a policy, a white paper, a list of what you need to research, an analysis of data, a list of pros and cons, an action plan, a signed contract... what's the end result you want or need?

5. Process – what is the appropriate process to get the outcome you want from this meeting?

**How well do
YOU
give a report at
a staff meeting?**



If you're giving a report or an update consider speaking in bullets.

Yeah, that's what I said.

If you were giving your colleagues a written report, it would be easier and faster for them to

more streamlined ways to get to your outcome than hours of painful discussion.

3. Have an agenda with times and a time-keeper. Mail the agenda at least 24 hours in advance. It gives everyone the opportunity to come better prepared. It's pretty simple, but putting it up on a flip chart or a white-board does several things. First, at the beginning of the meeting, it gives the group a chance to agree on the time frame. If it's clear that you're trying to cram too much into the meeting, it gives someone a chance to say so and let the group make adjustments. Second, it helps people adjust expectations to make the meeting truly productive. Third, it keeps people from dragging out a report or their comments by realizing they've got a specified amount of time. And yes, you can adjust the times as you go along. It's a group negotiation. If you see that you need more time to finish something, then the group can decide to table it and finish it at a future meeting, call for the question by voting on a decision (if it's that simple and it's an appropriate time to ask for a decision), or keep going and knock something else off today's agenda. Let them decide. This keeps the group engaged, accountable for keeping meeting time relevant and appropriately limits discussion. Don't forget to assign someone as the time keeper. That person should provide the group a five-minute notice and ask for concluding thoughts on the item before moving onto the next topic listed on the agenda.

4. Have a note-taker who does the minutes. This is a simple one. Don't try to lead, run or facilitate the meeting and also take the notes. The note-taker should be the same person who puts out the minutes. The minutes should be disseminated quickly – within a day or two after the meeting. The minutes should have names, action items, next steps and relevant dates for each highlighted with a different color so folks can easily find their name and anything they are responsible for following up on and by what date. This could be a task that becomes a source of

read if as much as possible were in bullet form rather than paragraph form.

So if you're giving a verbal report, think about speaking in bullets – tell them you're going to do it, so they don't think you've started talking like a robot, but give them the highlights in short concise statements.

They'll appreciate it and you can start a trend that will speed it up for everyone.



"AND SHOULD THERE BE A SUDDEN LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS DURING THIS MEETING, OXYGEN MASKS WILL DROP FROM THE CEILING."

Last, but not least – periodically assess the necessity of various types of meetings.

And if they're not working any longer, either get rid of them or redesign them!



More Meeting Tips

conflict, so consider rotating the task among group members.

5. Use ground rules. Why? Ground rules help in a variety of ways. It holds members of the group accountable to agreed upon norms and supports the culture the group may be trying to create or maintain. Here are examples from different groups I've worked with:

- Be on time; start on time; end on time
- Cell phones and pagers on vibrate and don't be looking at your phone
- Put your voice in the room; your idea or comment doesn't have to be perfect or perfectly stated – we value your input and ideas
- Equalize air-time among the members of the group (let everyone speak)
- If you don't know, ask – no stupid questions is our rule
- Mean what you say, say what you mean and don't be mean when you say it
- It's ok to take notes on your laptop – (but tell us that's what you're doing so we don't think you're working and not paying attention)
- Actively listen
- Agree only if it makes sense to you to do so

6. Consider a stand-up style for check-in type meetings. A lot of teams use a morning meeting or a weekly meeting just for a check-in about what's happening, status updates, and keeping everyone on the same page. This can be more efficient than communicating over email. For one thing, that email chain can become long and hard to follow or find when you need it. Another thing, everybody doesn't have time or take time to read all their emails. So, if you're using this and it meets your needs, great! If it started out as a great idea, but has become too long and people are sharing too much, consider making it a stand-up circle. Take away the chairs and it will instantly

- Arrive 5 minutes early
- Start and end on time
- Bring paper and pen
- Set up equipment ahead of time
- Come prepared
- Stay on topic
- Be brief
- No interrupting
- Share all relevant data
- Confirm everything
- Have a plan B
- Get feedback
- Introduce guests

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shorten reports, help people say just what's needed and get you out of there a whole lot faster. You can also use these short stand-up meetings on an ad hoc basis. If there's a critical issue, and everyone is around, ask the group for a 10-minute standup. Ten-minute stand-ups can be an awesome new group tool.

7. Never leave without defining and agreeing on NEXT

STEPS. The last part of every meeting should be to define the next steps. If you've had numerous agenda items, list next steps for each as you go along so you can simply review them at the end of the meeting. Be sure you have necessary dates and who is responsible for what. A very appropriate item to include in next steps is what needs to be done for/prepared by/brought to the next meeting, and then be sure everyone has the next meeting on their calendar!

Can I help you design a process for one or more of your meetings? Do you have a retreat coming up, or an annual meeting or are developing a whole new meeting to address a specific need? Or do you perhaps need a facilitator for a meeting? **Schedule a no-cost consultation to share your meeting challenges and let's talk about how I might help you.**

Happy Bobsledding,



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