



FactSheet

Extension

Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet

Ohio State University Leadership Center

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Making Meetings Manageable

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It can be difficult to decipher a funeral from a meeting. Each event is "a gathering of people who are wearing uncomfortable clothing and would rather be somewhere else."—Dave Berry

Is the above quote an accurate reflection of many of the meetings you attend? Are you responsible for planning meetings and want to make certain that the participants don't mistake it for a funeral? The tips presented here are helpful for ensuring that meetings start off in the right direction and continue toward the established goal.

What Makes a Meeting Successful?

The key to a successful meeting is *thoughtful planning*.

Step 1. Determine the purpose of the meeting.

Why is this meeting being scheduled?
What needs to be accomplished?

Step 2. Determine the outcome.

When the meeting has concluded, what will the product be?

"Determine whether you are planning the meeting out of habit or necessity. Habit is never a good reason for a meeting; it only devalues the idea of a meeting for participants and costs the company a great deal of money," says Paul R. Timm, Ph.D.

Step 3. Ask the question: Do we need to have a meeting?

To accomplish the stated purpose and objective(s), is it necessary for people to come together for a meeting? What alternatives are available for accomplishing the same result? Instead of a meeting, consider these options — sending a memo or an e-mail, holding a conference call, having one-on-one contact either in person or by telephone, or setting up a video conference.

Step 4. Who needs to participate in this meeting?

Noting the purpose of the meeting and the desired outcome, consider the people who need to come together to make this happen. Make certain those people are included.

Are there people who attend meetings who have no input in the work being done? Perhaps just keeping them informed by means of the agenda and the minutes is sufficient.

Most people will be pleased to cross another meeting off their calendar. As an added bonus, these same people are more likely to attend when their input is needed.

Step 5. Select the meeting place.

Building on what is to be accomplished and who is to attend, where is the best place to hold the meeting? Keep in mind the size of the group, time of day, access, equipment required, lighting, heating/cooling, comfort of furniture, and more. The more comfortable and convenient the environment, the more likely people are to remain engaged in the meeting.

Step 6. Provide an agenda.

Having an agenda is key to a successful meeting. A thoughtful agenda may be prepared in advance and provided to all participants.

As the agenda is prepared, consider materials that are needed to explain items or to make decisions. Such materials should be sent in advance along with the agenda. By doing so, participants come to the meeting prepared. Meeting time is used toward accomplishing the stated purpose rather than reading materials and becoming familiar with the task at hand.

Participants may modify the agenda. It is suggested that at the beginning of the meeting, the agenda be reviewed, clarified, and modified. Additions or changes to the agenda should be accepted by consensus of those participating.

These steps allow for ownership of the agenda, advance preparation by participants, and some control over agenda items.

Step 7. Consider the equipment needed for the meeting.

Before going into a meeting, make certain that all equipment needed to accomplish the desired outcome is available. Consider flip charts and colored markers for scribing, masking tape, dots for prioritizing, sticky notes for storyboarding, overhead projector, video and TV, audio player, extra paper, and pencils. Whatever may be helpful should be available. Better to have and not need than to need and not have.

Step 8. Prepare your state of mind.

Think of each meeting as your meeting (even if you are not calling or leading the meeting.) Treat it like it matters. Go into the meeting knowing that you are prepared, that the right people are at the table, all advance information has been provided, an agenda is ready, and the necessary equipment is available.

Have a great meeting!

For information and suggestions on how to participate in the meeting either as the facilitator or a participant, please see [Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet LC-02-02](#).

For Additional Information

For additional information, visit the Ohio State University Leadership Center's site at: <http://leadershipcenter.osu.edu>

References

- Axtell, Paul P. 2000. *Foundations: Skills for fulfilling your individual and group potential*. Moline, Ill: Contextual Program Designs.
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- Timm, P. R. 1997. *How to hold successful meetings: 30 action tips for managing effective meetings*. Franklin Lakes, N.J.: Career Press.

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