The Ultimate Guide

for Running Effective Meetings

Workshop

Just about every employee at every company has to participate in meetings and almost 70% of meeting attendees report losing time because of poorly organized meetings. If you are Manager or Project Lead, your job is to ensure your teams are more efficient with their work, not less efficient. So why do so many meetings end up wasting people's time? We'll provide you with a framework for getting the most out of your meetings and help you gameplan against the most common time wasters that can cause meetings to go off the rails.

Make sure you are running AAA meetings

First and foremost, you want to go into every meeting with a gameplan of how to make it successful. We created the AAA (triple-A) framework to guide you through how to make your meetings count.

Here's how it works. Every meeting you organize should have 3 things:

Agenda

Did you know that 70% of meetings don't have an agenda? Meetings that don't have a clear agenda is also one of the top pet peeves meeting attendees have about meetings they are required to attend. Every agenda should include the topics to be covered, owners of those topics, and any documents or pre-read information that would be useful to the attendees.

Actionable

Meetings should be focused on actions. If your meeting doesn't include a list of decisions that were made, tasks that were assigned, or ideas that were generated, then the meeting likely wasn't as productive as it could have been. Focus your meetings on what needs to be accomplished during the meeting and document those items to ensure they don't get lost in the shuffle.

Accessible

Notes and resources used during the meeting should be accessible to all attendees. Your team may use multiple apps for getting work done (e.g. Asana/Go-

ogle Docs/Trello/Jira/Slack etc.), but there needs to be a single source of truth where all of the things that were decided in the meeting can be accessed.

Identify and Address Common Time Wasters

We poured through tons of studies on what makes meetings more or less efficient, and these were the most common reasons your meetings are probably not as efficient as they could be and how you can prevent them.

Meetings that should be emails

How do you determine if a meeting should be an email? Well, that can be a little tricky, but if you start with the mindset that if you need to disseminate information, then your default should be an email. The one exception would be if you are disseminating information that may be more emotionally packed. So if you need to share bad news (layoffs, budget cuts, etc.) or particularly good news (promotions, big company announcements, etc.), then you should do those in person. If your meeting needs to come to a consensus on a decision or brainstorm new ideas, then having a meeting is probably best.

Lack of preparation by the meeting organizer

Time and time again, the number one complaint of meeting attendees is that the meeting is not organized. For the vast majority of meetings, the solution to this is quite clear. Include an agenda in the meeting invite that lays out what items will be covered, who will cover them, how much time they have to cover them, and include any files or documents that attendees should read ahead of time. More than 70% of all meetings don't include an agenda. By including the agenda, you'll immediately be starting the meeting off on the right foot.

Unclear actions or decisions made during the meeting

One of the ways to make the team feel like their time was wasted, is to walk out of a meeting without a clear idea of what actions or decisions were made. To help combat this, it's important to have the meeting organizer or a note-taker

move the conversation towards outcomes. If the facilitator has a mindset of needing to have a clear and concise list of at least 3-5 items that were decided upon during the meeting, everyone will feel like at least some progress was made.

Unnecessary meeting attendees

Just about everyone has been in a meeting where there were a bunch of people that didn't need to be there. This causes 2 problems. 1) The might interject opinions or ideas that cause it harder to come to a decision (the too many cooks in the kitchen problem) or 2) They might sit there silently and not participate at all. If they are in a meeting and don't speak the entire time, there is a good chance they shouldn't have been in the meeting to begin with. To help combat this problem, you should purposefully keep your meeting small. The most productive meetings tend to have 5 people or less, so if you are inviting more people than that, be honest with yourself as to whether they actually need to be in the meeting or if they could simply be filled in later.

Meetings that don't start or end on time

Having meetings start or end on time on probably one of the most obvious time wasters. If you don't start the meeting when it's supposed to be started, you lose productivity before you even get started. If you run over time, you are just robbing time from another priority of yourself and the other folks in attendance. To help address this, make sure everyone knows that being on time is important. Set an end time that is actually a few minutes before the end of the half--hour or hour (e.g. set the calendar invite so it ends at 2:50 pm instead of 3 pm). You'll also want to assign a meeting facilitator to ensure that the meeting gets kicked off right away and that the folks presenting stay on schedule with their topics so it doesn't run too long.

The loudest voice in the room dominates the conversation

Sometimes you just have that one person in a meeting that doesn't seem to let anyone else contribute their ideas. When this happens, you can try a few things. First, acknowledge that their voice has been heard and then try redirecting the

conversation to other folks in the room. Something like "I appreciate those ideas, Tyler. I wanted to get a few other perspectives as well. Jessica, it sounds like you had some thoughts as well. Would you mind sharing those with us?"

If the person continues to not get the hint, it may be worth calling them out more directly. Something like "Tyler, I appreciate your opinions on this, but you have been speaking quite a bit and it isn't allowing others to contribute. Would you mind pausing on jumping in for a bit while we get some other perspectives?"

Don't forget about Room and Resource Preparations

When it comes to running an effective meeting, one of the most overlooked steps that people forget about is to allocate adequate time to prep the materials for the meeting and the meeting space itself. Proper room and resource prep includes 4 steps.

Ensure documents for the meeting are ready to go ahead of time.

If materials need to be printed, make sure you give yourself plenty of time to do it ahead of time. Bring the materials with you to the room and make sure they are either laid out on the conference tables for each individual or make sure they are stacked in an organized way for them to be easily and quickly distributed if the attendees should not have them at the beginning of the meeting. If you are on a virtual call, make sure you have an easy way for the documents to be distributed. Emailing them to attendees while on the call isn't ideal as it can take several minutes to receive emails and you will waste time waiting for everyone to receive it. If you can provide digital versions of the materials to the attendees ahead of time, that should also save everyone lots of time and will make folks more productive.

Room setup matters

Make sure you pay attention to your room set up before your meeting. By spen-

ding a few minutes getting it prepped, you can help get more out of your meeting. Do some seats not have a great view of your screen where you will be presenting? Are some seats farther away from the microphone that would be needed to pick up their voice on a conference call? Is the room large enough to hold the meeting attendees? If you are going to have a collaborative discussion, having the team sit around the table in a circle is helpful. If you need to break into small groups, you make want to make smaller workspaces for them to collaborate in. By making sure you work through the logistics of these things ahead of time, you'll get more out of your meeting.

Do a trial run of the tech

The bottom line is, if you are using technology to hold your meeting, it's bound to have problems at some point or another. Before the meeting, make sure you do a trial run with all the technology you'll be using. Make sure you can display your laptop when plugged into the display, ensure you have the right Zoom account (upgrade to a paid account so you don't hit the 40 minute limit on the free account), test the microphones in the room, etc. Nothing will derail a meeting faster than technical issues. You may not be able to eliminate all of them, but you can certainly cut them down if you test everything first.

Start having actionable meetings

The key to running a great meeting is to not overthink it. By sticking to a game plan (the AAA meeting framework), anticipating potential time-wasters, and prepping your meeting space, you're setting yourself up for success. If you optimize your prep towards making sure the meeting has tangible outcomes (e.g. we made several decisions, we scheduled follow-ups, we trained people), your meetings will never feel like a waste of time. Always over-index towards the meeting being actionable and you can't go wrong.