

Making the Most of Meetings

Well organized meetings can be productive, stimulating, and even fun! Here are a few things managers can do to make their meetings more productive.

Start and end meetings on time

Each time we delay the start of a meeting we actually teach people to be late. Chronic late arrivals have no reason to change their pattern, because we wait for them. Those who are on time silently fume, thinking of what they could have accomplished had they stayed in their offices an additional 15 minutes. Unfortunately, the next time they will.

Invite the right people

When employees are asked to sit through long meetings dealing with issues that do not affect them, they are given the message that wasting time is not only acceptable but is in fact supported by management. Issues which affect only a few people should be placed at the end of the agenda so others may be excused.

Ask people to come prepared

Make it clear that people need to come to the meeting prepared with information and prepared to work. Ask participants to commit themselves to the meeting and to their colleagues. Set a purpose for the meeting that is clear and achievable then stick to that purpose. Document decisions or follow-up and make them available immediately.

Get employees involved

A well managed meeting will include discussion and decision-making. Get people involved but don't lose control of the meeting. Ask open-ended questions; redirect comments, encourage humour; ask for clarification; listen and summarize. If your facilitation skills are a bit rusty, take a course or ask for some coaching from a mentor or manager.

Ask for feedback and act on it

Take a 'continual improvement' approach to meetings by asking for feedback after each meeting. This can be done formally through feedback tools such as surveys or informally by simply asking: what's working at our meetings and what can we change to make them better?

Learn to cope with problems

Despite your best efforts, problems will arise. Learn how to deal with disruptive behaviour, deadlocks, interruptions and technology so that people accomplish their purpose.

Meetings may be a necessary evil in the world of work. Making a few small changes can at least make them a productive necessary evil.