



## Meetings That Matter

**A** CEO of an organization asked his staff of 30 to post on a Wiki page what they liked or disliked about staff meetings over the years. A couple of the common answers were “no staff meetings for staff meetings sake” and “a solid start and stop time.”

When it comes to those necessary meetings at work, the three most common complaints seem to be that there are either too many of them, not enough of them, or they are a complete waste of time.

I suggest that too many meetings can derail production. *Salary.com* states that the number one productivity killer in organizations is unnecessary meetings. On the other hand, not enough meetings can derail communication. It has been proven time and time again that with a lack of consistent meetings conflict, among management and co-workers increase.

However, a timely and well planned meeting can enhance communication channels from the top down, increase production, and be an investment of time that can produce more efficiency—ultimately saving the organization time and money.

Just like a football team that needs the huddle to recalibrate and be aware of what to expect in the next play, so an office team can greatly benefit from opportunities to recalibrate, plan, vent, and brainstorm before they go back on the corporate field.

Staff meetings for staff meetings sake can be a very poor use of time yet there are several benefits for well managed meetings.

### Benefits of a Good Meeting

- ▶ Decisions are ratified or made
- ▶ Correcting inefficient processes
- ▶ Share appreciation for efforts made
- ▶ Celebration for goals achieved
- ▶ Accountability and follow up on previous agenda items
- ▶ Communication opportunities
- ▶ Face to face discussions rather than social media or emails

There are also some pros and cons that come along with those necessary meetings. I like to call them tips and taboos. Many of us are all too aware of what doesn't work when people are meeting together. I just read that the term “meetingitis” has been coined as a new company virus!

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### Taboos for meetings

*Below are some suggestions on how to avoid taboos and meetingitis.*

**Unnecessary Distractions:** Several companies are now putting a ban on electronics during a staff meeting. One of the distractions that cause the most irritating nuisances is corresponding on text, email, or face book. Whether you are checking email or discussing what you want to order for lunch with a friend in a text, it is clear to everyone around the table that you are checked out and not invested in the time spent as a team.

Of course if you are transcribing minutes that's another story. I recommend that unless there are emergencies or a corporate understanding that you are on call, you might consider putting the device down and showing respect to the rest of the team members for the brief time you are together.

**Passive Tendencies:** Some leaders are passive when it comes to dealing with one on one conflict. Thus they would rather bring up a sensitive matter regarding an

individual at the meeting rather than go to him/her privately to resolve the matter before the meeting. The problem with this of course is that the individual is embarrassed in front of their co-workers and the rest of the co-workers are thinking why there supervisor wasn't strong enough to handle this in a professional way beforehand. They also are worried if that will happen to them in a future meeting as well!

**Lack of Organization:** There is a lot that can go gone wrong under this category. First and foremost the meeting should begin and end at the scheduled time. This communicates to the participants that their time is to be respected and valued. To go over the stated time is to create frustration in those who run a tight schedule and have to walk out of the meeting. As a public speaker I learned a long time ago the meaning of the phrase "the mind can only absorb what the seat can endure."

The other matter that can get the agenda sidetracked is the inability to turn the discussion around once it gets off track so that we can't continue going in the desired direction.

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Sticking with the subject at hand is essential, to do otherwise is to have a jumbled and unorganized meeting that leave people feeling if anything was accomplished.

**Micromanaging Discussions:** If you want your staff to glaze over and become bored then allow no time for the discussion of ideas, hear others perspective, or garner feedback from them.

I've had frustrated managers tell me that employees don't open up in staff meetings. When I asked what their format was they've said "well at the end of the meeting I asked if they had any questions or anything else they wanted to say and there was no reply." To which I have said, "What else is there to say?" "They have been instructed on what to do and there hasn't been an opportunity to discuss anything"!

Military and top down management doesn't work anymore unless your career is in law enforcement, fire rescue, or military. Staff want to have buy in and desire to offer their creative solutions or at the very least offer ideas and suggestions, especially if they have expertise in that area.

**Inappropriate Discussions About Another Staff Member:** This is never recommended if the person is not there to defend themselves. Unless you are looking for solutions to help with the staff member's tardiness problem or administration is discussing a better fit for her within the organization that's a different matter.

***"Problematic behavior should be dealt with in private, and not publicly aired to get support and agreement from others."***



### Tips for Meetings

*Here are a few tips that can benefit and help in meetings that matter.*

- 1. Have a Clear Plan and Agenda:** If the reason for the meeting is unclear to you, it will definitely be unclear for those that are attending. It is advised in the planning phase of a meeting to first ask yourself what is it you want to accomplish. Are you alerting people to a change in management? Is there a specific problem we need to find a solution for?

Are we going to brainstorm a new office policy or procedure? Standing meetings with a vague purpose such as updating the status of each employee is rarely a good use of time.

In addition, it is said that "an agenda is the compass for discussion." Well managed agendas keep the discussion on course to reach the planned destination. It is preferred that the most pressing agenda items be kept to 2-3 while other matters can be highlighted and move up the agenda latter for the next staff meeting. If there are multiple pressing matters staff can become uninterested and start looking at social media again.

Some offices send the agenda items out a few days before the meeting so they can prepare and intelligibly think through the discussion points. It also helps to have the agenda on a screen or written on the white board to keep the participants focused.

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**2. Designate a Moderator or Facilitator:** Meetings shouldn't be free for all if you want to use the best of your time. Designating someone to manage the discussions are helpful for at least three reasons:

- ▶ They keep the discussions going forward in the right direction and avoid the talking points from going off the rails. They must be assertive and diplomatic to do this because sometimes you have to cut off another who is too verbose.
- ▶ They balance discussions between those who have a tendency to dominate the issues versus those who have excellent insights but have shy tendencies or need encouragement to speak up.
- ▶ They have the ability to table the matters that can inadvertently cut in on the agenda items until the next meeting as well as making sure the clock is managed well.

**3. Finish with an Action Plan:**

W.W.D.W.B.W. (Who will do what by when)?

Who was a task delegated to and when is their deadline to report back? What individual or group were assigned to make phone calls to whom and when? With what individual does the manager need to speak to and by what date? What goals were achieved at the meeting? What staff member should be followed up on within a couple of days regarding their excellent input and ideas shared at the recent meeting?

Nothing is quite as frustrating for busy and competent professionals than to have loose ends hanging and walk away from a one hour meeting without any takeaways or targets to shoot for.

**4. Follow up:** Within 24 hours it is recommended to send an outline of the highlights or discussion points to the attendees for the purpose of documenting the responsibilities given, tasks delegated, and any assigned deadlines. That way, everyone will be on the same page.

My wife, as a nurse manager, has her team sign off on the notes sent and if one of the members were absent they also need to read the minutes and sign off indicating that they read and understood what they missed.

In conclusion it is recommended that whatever meetings are schedule that they be consistent. Some companies have administration meet weekly while the individual departments meet monthly. It's not a bad idea to have the entire company meet annually.

Whatever the case, what takes place in a meeting that matters can become the driving force behind the successful relationships, productivity and excellence that keeps an organization strong for years to come.



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Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.