

MANAGING MEETINGS

Prepared For

DETROIT PRESBYTERY

McGee & Associates

P. O. Box 7184, Ann Arbor, MI 48107

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(734) 995 3671

MEETING TRAINING

ARRANGE THE FACILITY

SEATING

SET UP SEATS TO ENCOURAGE PREFERRED BEHAVIOR

Rows = listen, take notes, monologues

Horseshoe = leader and member, individual dialogues

Circle = discussion among members

TOO MANY EMPTY SEATS CREATE A FEELING OF INSECURITY

WORK SPACE

Tables for writing individual ideas

Pads of paper for recording group ideas

LIGHTING

Natural: be sure sunlight doesn't shine in anyone's face

Artificial: be sure it is sufficient for work to be done.

SET GOALS

PURPOSE

Make sure there is task that needs to be accomplished before you call a meeting. If it simply "discussion" be sure you know what decision you are trying to reach.

Standard items can be put on a "consent agenda" if everyone is comfortable with that.

AGENDA

An agenda is a list of items that need to be discussed at a meeting along with the amount of meeting time that will be allowed for that discussion. The agenda is usually sent to group members in advance, along with any backup material that they need to understand in order to reach a conclusion about an item.

The agenda lists the items in the order they are to be discussed and suggests a time allocation that reflects the item's importance to the group's goals. Each item should have a person responsible for leading the discussion, and supplying any necessary background material.

The chair or facilitator is responsible for seeing that the agenda is followed, and the time limits adhered to.

In most cases the discussion needs to come to a conclusion with a decision on how to handle the item.

The following are typical items found on agendas:

Warm-up. A centering activity that lets people explain what outside events are distracting them from the group's business.

Review. Looking at the agenda and adding or deleting items, and modifying time estimates.

Items. A list of discussion topics including a sentence or two that defines the item, why it is being discussed, and what kind of decision needs to be reached during the meeting.

Timeline. The estimated time in minutes needed to discuss each item.

Presenters. The person who originated the item, is most responsible for it, or who is knowledgeable about it. Usually this person presents the item.

Breaks. If the meeting lasts more than two hours, schedule at least one short break.

Evaluation. A self-evaluation by the group to assess what parts went well and what parts seem to be ineffective.

RUN THE MEETING

There are three separate roles that need to be filled in any meeting. The task leader is usually the facilitator or chair. The gatekeeper is someone appointed by the chair, or rotated among all members of the group. The recorder keeps track of the ideas discussed, and why they were accepted or rejected, as well the wording of any consensus agreements or wording and outcome of formal votes.

TASK LEADER

The task leader essentially keeps the group on task. This person makes sure the agenda has reasonable estimates of time for each item, and that the discussion stays on topic during that time.

The task leader sums up the group consensus, and makes sure that everyone agrees to the summary. If strict Roberts Rules procedures are followed, the task leader brings the question to a vote.

GATEKEEPER

The gatekeeper keeps the group functioning in a healthy way. This person makes sure that everyone is specifically asked to contribute to the discussion. While some quiet types will not volunteer much, they need to state out loud whether or not they agree with the conclusions, or whether they see something else that needs to be considered.

This function keeps the discussions in the meeting and out of the parking lot.

RECORDER

The recorder for the meeting either takes private notes, or records items on newsprint for the whole meeting to keep track of. Either way, the recorder is responsible for summarizing the discussions and conclusions, typing them up, and being sure they get to all members well before the next meeting.

If a good idea surfaces during the meeting that is not on a topic currently under discussion, the recorder is responsible for capturing and retaining that idea so that the discussion does not get off track. He or she then makes sure that the idea is added to the agenda either at the current meeting or the next.

Especially important is the list at the end of the notes where tasks for the next meeting are listed separately from the discussion. With this list everyone knows who is responsible for getting what information, or accomplishing which tasks.

USE THE AGENDA FOR PROCESS MANAGEMENT

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Review. Looking at the agenda and adding or deleting items, and modifying time estimates.

Items. A list of discussion topics including a sentence or two that *defines* the item, *why* it is being discussed, and what kind of *decision* needs to be reached during the meeting.

Timeline. The estimated time in minutes needed to discuss each item.

Presenters. The person who originated the item, is most responsible for it, or who is knowledgeable about it. Usually this person presents the item.

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MANAGE DISRUPTIONS

There are several types of disruptions that can throw a meeting off track. Some are process issues and some are personality issues.

PROCESS ISSUES

A group's processes are how it functions and runs itself. Usually there are agreed upon ground rules. Often disruptions can be minimized by writing out these ground rules so that everyone can explicitly agree to them. Robert's Rules contain a number of well-known rules, but there are other expectations that need to be clarified, like how to handle absences, and what is "late" in arriving at a meeting.

GROUND RULES

Successful groups agree on ground rules for group member's behavior. These rules describe both *appropriate* and *inappropriate* behavior.

Common group agreements about behavior include topics such as scheduling of meetings, agenda setting, recording of group decisions, facilitating, handling absences, communications procedures between meetings, and resolving conflicts.

A few common rules include:

Come on time and prepared for all meetings.

Follow agendas to the maximum extent possible.

Stay focused by eliminating outside interruptions. Turn off cell phones.

State opinions openly and honestly. No hidden agendas.

Meet your responsibilities. Ask for help if problems arise.

Share information openly. Information is the property of the group, not the individual.

Listen carefully to each member's contribution. Let them complete their comments without interruption.

Listen completely to each member's contribution. Don't carry on side-bar conversations, read, etc.

Change your mind when you receive new information. Be willing to support group decisions.

Use appropriate language. Humor or language that is offensive keeps your group from becoming a functioning team.

PERSONALITY ISSUES

Four common personality issues arise in meetings. The Dominator, the Shrinking Violet, the Cheerful Slacker, and the Cynic often make it hard to accomplish a group's tasks.

THE DOMINATOR.

The dominator knows the answers to everything and is not shy about letting you know. Usually this person talks more than anyone else, interrupts others when they are speaking, and in general makes it hard for anyone else to get their ideas considered.

Use the Gatekeeper to say, "John, would you mind letting us hear from everyone else before you contribute again?" and then let the Gatekeeper remind John in a friendly way to wait until everyone has spoken. You may also want to institute ground rules like no one speaks more than twice on any issue. Or you may use a physical device like a talking stick to indicate who has the floor.

THE SHRINKING VIOLET

The Shrinking Violet has been known to sit through a whole two-hour meeting without ever saying anything. Sometimes they will contribute their ideas, one-on-one to someone in the parking lot after the meeting, when they are getting into their car.

Use the Gatekeeper to say, "Violet, what do you think about that idea?" Be sure the question requires ideas, not just a yes or no answer. And give the Violet time to mull over the information ahead of time if possible by sending out an information packet and agenda ahead of time.

THE CHEERFUL SLACKER

The Cheerful Slacker is so agreeable, that it is sometimes weeks or months before anyone realizes that they aren't actually doing anything. They will agree to anything that you ask them to do, but somehow never get around to it.

Use the Task List at the end of the meeting to be sure that everyone knows what needs to be accomplished between meetings, and what the deadline for doing the task is. Provide an accountability partner for the person if feasible.

THE CYNIC

Cynics have seen it all, done it all, and it never has worked before. Their glass is always half empty. They don't see the point of doing X, because (pick one of many excuses).

Use the gifts of the Cynic to keep her or him on course. When asked to do something they are good at, they will often surprize even themselves with the excellence of the outcome. Again, an accountability partner can help keep the person on track.

END THE MEETING

There are four things to do at the end of a meeting that will help your group be ready to get to work at the very beginning of the next meeting. Use task lists to make sure everyone knows their individual responsibilities. Prepare a preliminary agenda for the next meeting. Conduct a quick self-evaluation of how well you followed your own guidelines for running a meeting. And end with an activity that brings closure to the meeting

TASK LISTS

The recorder, during the meeting, keeps track of every task that someone has agreed to do, and the necessary tasks that have not been picked up by a volunteer. At the end of the meeting, the recorder reviews out loud what these tasks and responsibilities are. If some task has not been assigned, the facilitator should specifically ask someone to take it on.

DEVELOP A PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Most groups have ongoing projects that carry over for two or three meetings. The next steps in those projects should be captured as the preliminary agenda for the next meeting.

During most meetings the recorder will capture some new ideas, or follow-up ideas that can't be handled in the current meeting, but do need to be addressed by the group. These ideas are reviewed at the end of the meeting to see if any of them need to be added to the preliminary agenda for the next meeting.

EVALUATE YOUR EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

One of the last items on the agenda is to quickly review how well the group is working. Ask each person to comment on what is going well and what they can do themselves to improve the next meeting.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

An official end to the meeting is necessary. Using Robert's Rules, there is a motion to adjourn which is undebatable. Many groups use a benediction before members leave.