

# Have the Best Meeting of Your Career

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# Introduction

Host a meeting?

Yeah, you know how to do that.

You have been having one, two, fifteen a week since you entered the workforce. You know how to host a meeting and get what you need.

But have you?

Read on to discover the tips to a killer meeting compiled by the facilitation experts at Leadership Strategies.

You may have held 1 million meetings in your lifetime, but continue on to discover how to have the best meeting of your career.

# Create an Agenda



Expert meeting facilitators know that one of the most useful tools at their disposal for a productive meeting is a detailed, well-planned and organized meeting agenda.

Managers and business leaders mention meeting agendas, but do you actually write one every time?

Holding meetings that begin and end on time, stay focused and get participants involved all begin with setting the right agenda. Follow the practical suggestions below to create an agenda for your next meeting that will help steer your meeting toward success.



## Be Selective About Topics

Make sure that only pertinent issues relating to the main topic of discussion are included in your agenda. Opt for timely issues that impact your group in the present versus resurrecting old issues that have little or no relevance to the matter at hand. If someone brings up unrelated issues, inform them that his or her concerns can be taken up at another meeting; keep the discussion focused on the agenda topics.

## Provide Relevant Supporting Materials

Distribute materials that you want your participants to be familiar with for the meeting ahead of time. Note the issues in the agenda these materials relate to or explain. In this way, your participants will be able to discuss the topics on your agenda intelligently and meaningfully since they are all familiar with the support materials. This also makes it easier for them to stay on topic.

## Include Action Steps

Although the specific steps to be taken will often only be arrived at after the group has reached a consensus at the end of the meeting, be sure to factor in time in your agenda to discuss what these steps should be. Note clear and measurable action steps as well as who is responsible for them and a time for completion.

## Set Clear Expectations

Not every meeting will change the direction of your company; however, every meeting should achieve the goal for which it was called in the first place. Achieve this by being very clear about your goals and objectives in your agenda. This will help keep your participants focused and engaged.





# Start the Meeting

All your carefully chosen participants enter the conference room. ... it's all yours now. How do you start a meeting? Go over ground rules? ...Boring! Introduce everyone to each other? Important, but probably not first. Review the agenda? Probably the MOST common error!

So what IS the most effective way to start meetings? Consider this – at the beginning of a meeting, people typically want to know two things.

Why am I here?

Why should I care?

So, in order to really engage your participants, and set your meeting up for success, put yourself in their place and be sure to answer those two questions before facilitating the rest of the meeting. To help ensure that the two questions are answered well, Leadership Strategies uses the abbreviations I.E.E.I. as a reminder of the things to include in your opening to start a meeting.

**Inform – Excite – Empower – Involve**



- Inform – Let the participants know the purpose of the meeting and the product to be produced.
- Excite – Explain the benefits of the meeting and why this meeting should be important to them.
- Empower – Describe the role they will play or the authority that has been given to them.
- Involve – Get them involved immediately through an engagement question that furthers the meeting purpose.

Unfortunately, meeting leaders often start meetings by reviewing the agenda (if they have one, which you will) and diving straight into the first agenda item. As a result, participants often aren't sure of the purpose of the meeting, the products to be produced, why the meeting is beneficial, or why the meeting should be important to them. In essence, meetings often begin with an ineffective start that can negatively affect the rest of the meeting.

### **Additional tips for a successful start to a meeting include;**

- Start the meeting on time, always.
- Your opening words (IEEI).
- Confirm the agenda.
- Review the ground rules.
- Make introductions if needed.

The start can take as little as five minutes and as long as forty-five minutes or more depending on the size of the group, the length of the meeting, and the steps you use. You should adjust the list as appropriate for the meetings you lead.

# Keep Participants Engaged

You've created a killer agenda, started your meeting off perfectly with IEEI – is there anything else that could go wrong?

Possibly.

You could host a boring meeting.

You know about boring meetings – every office worker has had to endure them once or twice or weekly. They seem interminable, pointless and ultimately self-defeating, no matter how noble or important the topic of discussion may have been.

Facilitating meetings successfully is a skill that does not always come naturally to the people who have to run them. Below are useful tips to make sure your next long meeting comes off without a hitch.







## Tips to Engage

### **1. Involve Everyone and Stay on Topic**

Do not let one person dominate the meeting, no matter what their status in the company may be. Making sure that all your attendees are engaged and actively participating is a sure-fire way not only to hold their attention, but to keep your meeting moving at a good pace and in the right direction. If you did your homework, your attendees know the purpose of the meeting and have come prepared to discuss the points in your agenda. Be sure you stay on topic or you will lose their interest.

### **2. Employ Varied Techniques**

Keep in mind that variety is the spice of life; this holds true for your meetings as well. Have a PowerPoint presentation, use a question and answer technique to elicit new ideas, break them into small groups, have your participants role-play scenarios, etc. Choosing a variety of presentation and discussion methods will enliven your sessions and hold the interest of your participants throughout the meeting. It will also keep them guessing (as to what the next activity will be) and prevent them from getting bored and listless.

### **3. Use Humor**

No matter how serious the topic of discussion may be, using the right type of humor will help you hold the interest of your group. However, as a general rule, avoid raunchy, sexist or any type of off-putting humor. Stay away from making snarky comments at the expense of anyone in the meeting. Instead, share humorous personal anecdotes that relate to the topic of discussion or invite your participants to do so. This will indicate the level of sharing they are comfortable at and you can take your cue from there.

# Effectively End the Meeting

You have made it through the meeting, now you must make sure that you end it properly to reap the benefits of the effort you put in to organizing, preparing and leading it.

Ending a meeting leaves attendees with either a good or negative feeling. Use these five hacks to make certain your next meeting ends with attendees realizing the value of the gathering.





## No. 1: End on a Positive Note

Even if there has been tension and difference of opinion, strive to end the meeting harmoniously. A positive ending creates goodwill in attendees, instead of them walking away grumbling the meeting was a waste of time.

## No. 2: Wind Down Before the Scheduled Time

Savvy meeting facilitation requires an eye on the clock. Wrap up discussions a few minutes before the end time, so the presenter has time for some closing comments. Nothing ruins a meeting like going way past the scheduled ending time.

## No. 3: Reiterate its Overall Objective

Closing comments, like opening comments, need to include the overall goal of the meeting. It ties all the discussions together, and reminds participants of the objective the meeting achieved.

## No. 4: Connect with the Participants One Last Time

Meeting facilitators should spend a little time at the end of the meeting recognizing exemplary participants who contributed valuable ideas. Also, instead of rushing back to work or another meeting, stand at the door and thank participants for attending. Just a few seconds of one-on-one attention creates a positive reaction in most people.

## No. 5: Schedule Follow-Up Plans

Before the meeting adjourns, set the next step in place. Whether it's another meeting to measure progress or email follow up, ensure that every participant understands the next point of contact.

# Conclusion

Congratulations, if you followed all our steps correctly, you have just held the best meeting of your career! How did it feel?

Be this productive each time you have a meeting by creating an agenda, starting properly and on time, keeping participants engaged and ending on a positive note. We bet you will see efficiency and engagement rise in no time.

For more information or advice on meeting facilitation – contact Leadership Strategies at 1-844-332-5307.

