

Never hold a meeting unless it will provide all with significant value added!

If the meeting is held by an international agency, always remember national actors in terms of location, translation, internet access to share prior (i.e. agenda) post (i.e. minutes) meeting information, clashing with national agendas/ events.

1. BEGIN WITH A PURPOSE, ON TIME AND WITH A CLEAR AGENDA

When everyone sits down you say, "We are holding this meeting today to accomplish these goals and objectives."

It sets the foundation, establishes the parameters, organizes the terms of reference and tells everybody in the room WHY they are there, for HOW LONG, and WHAT THEY NEED TO ACCOMPLISH.

Be both specific and punctual with the timing. Be sure to announce the duration. This should also be printed at the top of your agenda, but you want to restate it in your introduction. Begin right on time. Do not penalize the people who were there on time by waiting for others who are late.

2. ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSION

It's very important that you get input from everybody, not only the people who have a lot to contribute and are eager, but also from those who are more shy and less likely to speak up. You want input from especially women and others who may be a little bit reluctant to try to compete with more aggressive or assertive people.

Remember that leaders don't dominate. Experience shows that leaders speak 50 percent of the time on average! You should take the role as a facilitator and avoid hogging the discussion. There is a tendency if you don't use the round-robin technique for you to speak more and more because you're the one who prepared the agenda.

Keep the discussion on track. A key job of the meeting leader is to keep bringing people back to the issue. Stick to the items on the agenda and don't allow discussion to stray or wander. By keeping the discussion back to the main issue, this will help you conduct more effective meetings and save a lot of time.

Remember to provide for translators when the meeting is only held in French or English and national actors may not feel comfortable with any of them (plan into coordination budgets).

3. PRESS FOR CLOSURE OF EACH ITEM OF THE AGENDA

Once you start talking on a subject, discuss it thoroughly but press for closure on WHAT HAS BEEN DECIDED and WHO'S GOING TO DO WHAT AND BY WHEN, before you go on to the next item on the agenda.

The inability to keep on track and to press for closure are the two major time wasters and major complaints from people who attend non-effective meetings.

4. SUMMARIZE THE MAIN POINT

Summarize at the end of each discussion point and at the end of the meeting. Set out and summarize your time and action schedules, and your implementation plan and assignments. Then have everybody in the meeting agree on what has been decided.

Something very interesting happens. There is what is called “peer pressure.” People who agree to do something in front of their peers are much more likely to follow through.

So getting people to commit publicly is a very powerful tool of meeting management psychologically and one of the best management skills used.

5. KEEP A RECORD

Finally, distribute minutes from the meeting within 24 hours. The more important the decisions that have been taken, the more important that you have them distributed in writing so that if they have questions they can get back to you. If there are no questions then they are accepting the record of the meeting as distributed. This is a final step that is very important part of conducting more effective meetings and improving your management skills.