

13.6: Personnel Efficiency

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of meetings.
2. Understand why meetings fail.
3. Understand the importance of an agenda.
4. Learn about behavioral issues in meetings.

If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be “meetings.” “Wanderings: Dave Barry Learned All This in 50 Years,” *Brent Zupp*, accessed February 6, 2012, www.wanderings.net/notebook/Main/ThingsLearn50YearsDaveBarry.

Dave Barry

Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything. Nancy Roman, “Meetings: How to Waste Time at Work,” *Cornelius & Associates*, accessed June 1, 2012, www.corneliusassoc.com/articles/Meetings%20waste%20time.pdf.

John Kenneth Galbraith

Managing Meetings

As a business grows, it will—in all probability—increase the number of its employees. As the employee base grows, there is increased demand to coordinate activities, exchange information, and engage in decision-making activities. These usually occur at meetings, and one would think that these would be straightforward events. Yet the reality is that many managers and employees come to dread participation at meetings. Data indicate that many, if not most, meetings fail to produce the desired outcome. A study conducted in 1993 found that executives were seen as spending seventeen hours per week in meetings, and one-third felt that time was wasted. Roy Woodard, “Meetings, Bloody Meetings,” *Credit Control* 15, no. 5 (1993): 1. Another survey of thirty-eight thousand managers found that 66 percent felt that the meetings they attend were a waste of time. Robert F. Moran Jr., “Meetings: The Bane of the Workplace, It Doesn't Have to Be,” *Library Administration & Management* 20, no. 3 (2006): 135–39, accessed February 6, 2012, journals.tdl.org/llm/article/view/1637/917. Still another study found that managers spend as much as 40 percent of their work time in meetings, but only 64 percent of those meetings were seen as achieving their intended outcome; Judith Lindenberg, “Make the Most of Your Meetings,” *Office Solutions* 24, no. 3 (2007): 40. another study found that executives were spending as much as 70 percent of their time at meetings, but only 40 percent of those meetings had clear objectives, and only 28 percent of those meetings with objectives actually met them. Stuart Levine, “Make Meetings Less Ready,” *HR Magazine* 52, no. 1 (2007): 107. Yet 80 percent of the participants viewed running a successful meeting as a crucial test of manager's abilities. Stuart Levine, “Make Meetings Less Ready,” *HR Magazine* 52, no. 1 (2007): 107. These figures are particularly tragic because so many meetings occur in the business world. One estimate puts the number of meetings, on a daily basis, globally, at 73 million. Charlie Hawkins, “‘F’ Words for Effective Meetings,” *Journal for Quality and Participation* 22, no. 5 (1999): 56. These are rather depressing figures, but the clear lesson for small business owners is that they cannot afford the luxury of not running their meetings effectively.

The good news is that the successful management of a meeting is a learnable skill. Roy Woodard, “Meetings, Bloody Meetings,” *Credit Control* 14, no. 5 (1993): 1. Conducting an effective meeting requires that a manager focus on both procedural and behavioral issues. We will first look at procedural issues associated with running a meeting. Before considering holding a meeting, ask the following question: “Is this meeting really necessary?” Frequent meetings are sometimes held merely out of habit. Kelley Robertson, “How to Run an Effective Sales Meeting,” *Changing Minds*, June 7, 2009, accessed February 4, 2012, changingminds.org/articles/articles09/effective_sales_meeting.htm. Can the goals of a meeting be achieved by other mechanisms? Stuart Levine, “Make Meetings Less Ready,” *HR Magazine* 52, no. 1 (2007): 107. These might include using the Internet; e-mail; teleconferencing; or technologies, such as MS Communicator, which allows for bulletin board interaction, voice communication, and videoconferencing. Interestingly, for all the complaints about meetings, a recent study indicated that face-to-face meetings were seen by 95 percent of those surveyed as being positive, especially in the interest of developing long-term relationships. Jay Boehmer, “Harvard Study Shows Face-to-Face Meeting Value, Rising Virtual Interest,” *Successful Meetings*, accessed February 6, 2012, www.successfulmeetings.com/Event-Planning/Technology-Solutions/Articles/Harvard-Study-Shows-Face-To-Face-Meeting-Value,-Rising-Virtual-Interest.

After deciding that a meeting is necessary, it is important to determine the nature of that meeting. Meetings may have many different types of goals. They can be directed to problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, providing information, or generating new ideas. T. L. Stanley, "Make Your Meetings Effective," *SuperVision* 67, no. 4 (2005): 6; Curt Smith, "Effective Meetings—Not an Oxymoron!" *Manage* 51, no. 1 (1999): 10. This is necessary because the nature of the meeting will drive its structure and internal dynamics. As an example, if a meeting is directed to a decision-making task, it should probably proceed in two parts. The first portion should be directed toward identifying solutions, while the second portion should focus on what might be the best solution. Robert F. Moran Jr., "Meetings: The Bane of the Workplace, It Doesn't Have to Be," *Library Administration & Management* 20, no. 3 (2006): 135–39, accessed February 6, 2012, journals.tdl.org/llm/article/view/1637/917. The next decision would be to determine who will participate in the meeting. Ideally, this list would be limited to those who would be directly affected by the outcome of the meeting; however, in the case of informational meetings, the list may be expanded to those who will be directly or indirectly affected. The next decision is associated with determining who will be assigned particular roles in the meeting. The chair is the individual who calls the meeting, provides the initial agenda, and specifies the purpose of the meeting. It may be useful to assign the role of facilitator to an individual. This neutral person can push the meeting along, particularly when conflict arises. It is desirable to have people trained as facilitators and rotate this position among facilitators. Charlie Hawkins, "'F' Words for Effective Meetings," *Journal for Quality and Participation* 22, no. 5 (1999): 56. Another important role is the individual who is officially assigned to take notes. The notes of the meeting should be written up and sent to all participants in the meeting within two business days. This position should also be rotated among the participants of the meeting. It also might be advisable to assign the role of timekeeper to an individual. The timekeeper has the task of limiting the amount of time spent on anyone agenda item to the previously agreed-on time frame. Wayne Chaneski, "Productive Meetings—Back to Basics," *Modern Machine Shop* 79, no. 11 (2007): 52, accessed February 6, 2012, www.mmsonline.com/columns/productive-meetingsback-to-basics.

Perhaps the most important activity prior to the actual meeting is the proper structuring of an **agenda**. In another study, 75 percent of those surveyed said that a good agenda is critical for a successful meeting. Judith Lindenger, "Make the Most of Your Meetings," *Office Solutions* 24, no. 3 (2006): 40. The agenda is the formal strategic plan for a meeting. It is the mechanism for ensuring that a meeting is focused on relevant topics. A failure to have a clear focus will guarantee that the participants will have a sense that nothing had been accomplished. Jim Sullivan, "Focused Agenda Can Energize Manager Meetings," *Nations Restaurant News* 37, no. 5 (2003), accessed February 6, 2012, findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3190/is_5_37/ai_97392571. Focus stems from having everyone understand a meeting's purpose and what one intends to achieve. Anonymous, "Running Meetings Effectively," *The British Journal for Administration Management*, October/November 2005, 25. Items on the agenda should be prioritized in terms of their importance, which is often done by allocating a specific amount of time to each agenda item. Charlie Hawkins, "'F' Words for Effective Meetings," *Journal for Quality and Participation* 22, no. 5 (1999): 56. Any and all resources that will be required for the meeting should be identified along with the individuals who are responsible for securing the resources. The roles of chair, timekeeper, note taker, and facilitator (where possible) should be assigned in advance. The agenda should be sent out at least five business days before the meeting so that participants can gather the required information. This timeline also allows for people to make suggestions for changing the agenda. It is also highly advisable to make it a policy that all participants arrive on time at the beginning of the meeting. Max Messner, "Conducting Effective Meetings," *Strategic Finance* 82, no. 12 (2001): 8, accessed February 6, 2012, findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6421/is_12_82/ai_n28842307.

Allowing individuals to contribute to the agenda will provide them with a sense that they are contributing. Kelley Robertson, "How to Run an Effective Sales Meeting," *Changing Minds*, June 7, 2009, accessed February 4, 2012, changingminds.org/articles/articles09/effective_sales_meeting.htm. In setting the timeline for the different items on the agenda, it is advisable that one allow for a few extra minutes at the end of the meeting to discuss how well the meeting went and how it could be improved. Charlie Hawkins, "'F' Words for Effective Meetings," *Journal for Quality and Participation* 22, no. 5 (1999): 56. These few moments should be expanded into a formal system. Assessing meeting effectiveness can be done through an external observer conducting an evaluation, focus groups, or surveys. Joseph Allen, Steven Regelberg, and John Scott, "Mind Your Meetings," *Quality Progress*, April 2008, 42, 4, 51. Figure 13.6 provides a format for a part of the overall agenda that addresses some of the previous suggestions. It is available as an agenda format wizard in Microsoft Word 2007.

Figure 13.6 Agenda Format



Expansion Plans

6/26/2012
10:00 AM to 11:00 AM
Main Meeting Room

Meeting called by:
Frank Rainsford

Type of meeting:
Information and Decision Making

Facilitator:
Frank Rainsford
Timekeeper:
Alice Jacobs

Note taker:
Bill Rogers

Attendees:
F. Rainsford, R. Rainsford, J.
Enders, A. Jacobs, L. Rogers,
W. Rogers

Please read:

1. Real Estate Report
for Darien
Commercial
Properties
2. Contractors
Responses to Our RFP
3. Budget Estimate for
Remodeling
Properties
4. Gantt Chart for
Remodeling Project

Please bring:

1. Personal Analysis
of Real Estate Properties
2. Critiques of Contractors'
Proposals
3. Critique of Budget
for Remodeling

Agenda Topics

Review of Available Properties	Jack Enders	15
Evaluation of Possible Contractors	Bill Rogers	15
Funding Requirements	Alice Jacobs	15
Develop Time Line for Next Stage	Lucy Rogers	15
Review	Frank Rainsford	5

Agenda Topics

Review of Available Properties Jack Enders 15 minutes

Discussion: Review and critique possible commercial properties in Darien

Conclusions:

Action Items:

Final selection of property

Person Responsible:

Frank Rainsford 9/26/1012

Deadline:

Evaluation of Possible Contractors			Bill Rogers	15
Discussion: Evaluate proposals to remodel commercial properties from the three contractors that provided responses to our RFP				
Conclusions: Evaluate economic viability of all three proposals				
Action Items:		Person Responsible:	Deadline:	
Enter into negotiations with winning contractor		Frank and Robert Rainsford	10/15/2011	
Funding Requirements			Alice Jacobs	15
Discussion: Review Budget estimates for Remodeling and purchase of new equipment				
Conclusions: Evaluate accuracy of budget estimates				
Action Items:		Person Responsible:	Deadline:	
Review comments and revise budget estimates		Alice Jacobs	9/31/2012	
Develop Time Line for Next Stage			Lucy Rogers	10
Discussion: Review Gantt Timeline for New Restaurant Project				
Conclusions:				
Action Items:		Person Responsible:	Deadline:	
Develop Time Line for Next Stage			Lucy Rogers	10
Discussion: Review Gantt Chart time line for new restaurant project				
Conclusions: Revise and resubmit				
Action Items:		Person Responsible:	Deadline:	
Generate revised Gantt Chart		Lucy Rogers	7/11/2011	

Video Clip 13.11

Business Management and Leadership Skills: How to Conduct an Effective Meeting

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The basics of meeting management.

Video Clip 13.12

Conducting Effective Small Scale Meetings

[\(click to see video\)](#)

How to conduct a meeting, even in one's home.

Video Clip 13.13

How to Avoid Meetings That Suck

[\(click to see video\)](#)

How to escape the traps behind bad meetings.

Web Resources

Managing Business Meetings

An excellent list of suggestions on business meetings.

www.cbsnews.com/8301-505125_162-51057051/managing-business-meetings/?tag=bnetdomain

Managing Your Meeting Monsters

Identifying the types of personalities at meetings.

www.impactfactory.com/p/business_meeting_skills_training_development/friends_111-1107-40530.html

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Poorly run meetings are common and costly.
- Successful meetings require structure and an agenda.
- The agenda should identify the purpose of the meeting, the participants and their roles, the requisite resources, and agenda topics with timelines.
- Behavioral issues must always be considered when managing a meeting.

EXERCISES

1. Interview the owners of five businesses and determine what percentage of meetings they attend they find to be “effective.”
2. Ask them what constitutes a *bad* meeting.
3. Ask them what constitutes a *good* meeting.
4. Create an agenda for a meeting with a fellow student who came up with an idea for a new business.

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