

## Tips for Managing Meetings

### 1. Know your purpose

Every time you call a group together you should be clear about the objective of the gathering. The corollary of this is: don't meet just to meet. The essential foundation of an effective meeting is clarity about what the meeting needs to accomplish.

### 2. Create a game plan

Once you are clear about the purpose of your meeting, a well-crafted agenda is the next critical element. A good agenda is a game plan for how the meeting will accomplish its purpose. This requires forethought and advance preparation. What information is relevant to the discussion? What key questions will help the group think through the relevant issues? Who needs to be at the table? It often means you need to consult in advance with key members of the group or other groups to shape your agenda.

### 3. Maximize participation

Meetings are dreadfully boring for attendees when they're placed in a passive role. And the consequence can be poor decisions, because participants lulled into boredom are unlikely to surface all the issues and concerns that need to be brought to the table. It's important to build your agenda around some well-framed discussion questions. And allow enough time for open discussion before moving too quickly to solutions. As conversation takes shape, be deliberate about drawing less active people into the discussion. And in larger groups, it's generally helpful to break into smaller conversation clusters for portions of the meeting.

### 4. Keep reasonable time limits

Regular meetings are best kept to 90 minutes or two hours at the most. If you're chairing the meeting, it's your responsibility to monitor the use of time and keep things moving or find acceptable ways of wrapping things up. Be realistic about the length of time it will take for a group to handle the business at hand. It's better to spread the work over several meetings than frustrate a group with an overly ambitious meeting plan.

### 5. Allow space for the Spirit to work

Often, the only difference between our church meetings and meetings in secular settings is a brief opening or closing prayer, but what goes on between these spiritual bookends is unaffected. What if instead we frame issues with relevant Bible study? Or stop in the midst of a group's deliberations to ask, "Where do you see the Spirit's presence in this discussion?" Or take time to pray in the face of disagreement or uncertainty? If group leaders do not model this type of spiritual inquiry, others will easily fall back on secular decision-making norms.

### 6. Drive decisions

Perhaps the most critical meeting management skill is helping a group come to a decision. Listen carefully to the drift of conversation and be attentive to threads of agreement. It can be helpful at key junctures simply to name where you hear commonalities. A quick vote can be an expeditious way of moving forward if a consensus is apparent. If you're not sure whether a decision has emerged, a quick, nonbinding straw poll can reveal where things stand. Good leaders drive commitment by extracting all opinions, ideas, and views, and then having the courage to move ahead.

## 7. Monitor follow through

You can have the best meeting ever, but if nothing comes of it after people leave the room, they will still end up feeling that the meeting was a waste of their time. So never leave a meeting room without clarifying exactly what was decided. A simple method of enabling follow through is to put together a written summary of the meeting — not formal minutes — but a quick summary of agreed-upon actions that can keep everyone accountable to their commitments.

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