

“Make Your Meetings More Impactful!”



A key responsibility of a team leader is to conduct effective meetings. Meetings, in theory, are meant to be a key way to generate new ideas, overcome obstacles and drive productivity. In reality, they often end up being about as useful as a Facebook post – lots of ideas are shared, but quickly disappear into the void with little to no follow up. What a waste

of time!

Online scheduling service **Doodle** studied 19 million meetings and interviews in the US, UK and Germany in 2018. They found that poorly organised meetings cost businesses in the UK \$58 billion in 2018 and a whopping \$399 billion in the US. What’s more, 44% of their respondents reported that poorly organised meetings prevented them from being able to complete the rest of their work. 38% believed that poor organisation contributed to a loss of focus on key projects. And interestingly, 31% reported that irrelevant meeting attendees slowed organisational progress.

Can you relate to any of this pain? I’ll wager you can. Maybe YOUR meetings are disorganised, filled with interruptions, too long or ineffective. I know many of the meetings I used to run in a prior business were useless. UNTIL I LEARNED HOW TO MAKE THEM BETTER!

We seem to have a very wide-spread problem! Every year since 2000, the time spent in meetings has increased an average of 10% each year¹. Yet many advanced countries have suffered falling productivity growth since the GFC. I’m not saying more meetings = falling global productivity, but it is one contributor that *is under our control!*

I’m writing this in order to share a few key things with you that will undoubtedly help your meetings become more engaging and more productive – resulting in better overall results for your business.

The first question you must ask yourself is this: “Is this meeting even necessary?” Perhaps the desired outcome can be accomplished through an email or a short conversation with one other person.

Once you have convinced yourself that the meeting IS necessary, you need to ensure the RIGHT people are in attendance. As mentioned above in the Doodle research study, 31% of meeting attendees participating in the study said they felt the organisation’s progress was slowed by NOT having the right people in meetings. What do the ‘right’ meeting attendees bring to the table? An open mind, ideas that they’re willing to voice, an action bias (meaning they stand ready to implement whatever is agreed on) and the skill of hearing other people’s ideas and adding their own unique ‘take’ on them.

The type of meeting you want to lead will determine who needs to attend, and there are 4 main types of meetings as outlined by Patrick Lencioni in his book, *Death by Meeting*. The first is the Daily Stand-Up. This is a 5-minute meeting where team members report on their priority activities for the

¹ www.Highfive.com technology provider

day. This type of 'check-in' should include everyone and helps avoid confusion about how priorities are translated into action. It helps the team remain focused and aligned.

The second type of meeting that Patrick describes is the Weekly Tactical Meeting. It should be 45-90 minutes in length and is for the purpose of resolving issues and prioritising work for the week (only the week) and should include those who have responsibility for key success metrics in the practice.

The Monthly Strategy Meeting is the third type of meeting that, if run correctly, can help the business stay on track with its goals and address operational issues that crop up. Set aside 2-4 hours for meeting attendees to engage in debate, problem-solving and higher-level thinking around critical topics that affect the business.

Finally, Lencioni advocates leaving the office for a Quarterly Off-Site Review where the team can focus on the big-picture issues – things like constant improvement, overall strategy, general team issues and new opportunities. He suggests setting aside 1 day for these meetings.

WHEW! I can see you shaking your head as you read those last few paragraphs. *"There's NO WAY I need all those meetings! I thought Jennifer was talking about how to have productive meetings, not drown me in them!"* I can vouch for their effectiveness when implemented correctly. Businesses that USE Daily Stand-Ups consistently to keep tasks on track, that implement Weekly Tactical meetings to trouble-shoot and upskill, that set aside time for Monthly Strategy Meetings and Quarterly Off-Site Reviews (which I am often asked to facilitate) are those businesses that enjoy 3 main benefits: 1.) engaged teams 2.) clarity and alignment and 3.) MOMENTUM.

Now that you know what type of meeting you're holding and who will attend, you need to ensure you have 4 essential elements in place to ensure it's run the RIGHT way.

- The first thing you need to do is **Plan Ahead**. Ensure you identify the desired outcome and how you need to prepare for the meeting (notes, AV, chocolate!).
- The second step is to **Set Clear Expectations**. You want everyone attending the meeting to understand the purpose of the meeting, why they're there and what a successful outcome will look like.
- The third step is to **Stay On Point**. Stick to your AGENDA and timings. Create a place to 'park' topics that aren't directly related that may come up. Decide how you'll handle the different communication styles around the table. *TIP – regularly reminding attendees of the desired outcome is a great way to stay on point.
- Finally, you need to **Clarify Next Steps**. Who will 'own' each action item? How long will they have to complete it? What, precisely, is expected?

Here are a few tips for how to conduct yourself as the leader of any meeting in order to make it the most effective it can be (I have 10, but I'm giving you 5 here!):

1. Lose 'I' and focus on 'we'
2. Build trust by acknowledging and valuing the people at the table
3. Read body language in the room. Who is engaged and who needs a wake-up call?
4. Don't make assumptions or complete people's sentences
5. Help settle on action items

Now, I know it's easy to think – *"We're just a small team. We don't need all those meetings."* No matter the size of the team, this process WORKS. You just need to be consistent. I've known businesses who have started Daily Stand-Ups, run them for two weeks and then stopped them again before they even had a chance to realise the benefits. YOU are the leader of your team and YOU are

the one who needs to model consistency. Choose a path of what meetings you will run and stick to it. Your team will thank you for it by becoming more focused, more engaged and more productive!

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