

*Leadership*

## **Leading meetings that no one wants to miss**

*By Rick Maier*

Do you spend most of your time in meetings thinking about all the other things you should be doing? Do you agree with the theory that the elephant is a horse designed in a committee meeting?

While I've attended more than my share of useless gatherings, I'm still a big fan of meetings - if they're done right. I believe that the most successful organizations have plenty of meetings, but they have learned how to make them concise and purposeful.

Here are some thoughts and suggestions for turning long, bureaucratic meetings into sessions where eager people join together to make great things happen.

### **Developing the right expectations**

Carefully define the goals of your meetings so that people expect the right outcomes. Are you trying to communicate, recognize, or make a decision? Choose one, maybe two of these goals, and work up an agenda around your specific project or meeting objective.

Confirm that you have a worthwhile reason for meeting by answering the questions "Could we accomplish as much through e-mail?" and "What's the worst thing that would happen if we didn't meet?"

Choose only enthusiastic people to attend your meetings. Send them materials to read before you meet. Select members with a variety of talents so that you can accomplish things together that no one person could achieve alone.

### **Practice good meeting techniques**

Good meetings don't come naturally. Take a class or hire a pro to teach meeting skills to your team. With a little training, most people can learn to lead meetings effectively. CEO's and department heads don't make great meeting leaders any more than the best ball players make great team managers (it can happen, it just doesn't necessarily follow). Rotating meeting responsibilities builds leadership skills and develops more leaders in your organization.

One of the first things you learn at meeting school is to adhere to strict standards. Post the following rules in every meeting room: 1. Start and end on time (put a clock in every meeting room). 2. Stick to the agenda. 3. One person talks at a time.

There are four important roles in a meeting. The leader develops the agenda and keeps everyone on task. The gatekeeper keeps everyone on the subject, the timekeeper makes

sure that everyone stays within the allotted times, and the scribe distributes a list of who said they would do what by when.

Make sure each person attending participates in project meetings (as opposed to communication or recognition meetings). Sometimes the best input has to be dragged out of people. Promote participation by doing a round robin, brainstorming, voting or simply asking those who haven't said anything to ask a question or express their views.

Understand that teams of people go through four stages – forming, norming, storming and performing. You can expect that a new task force needs time to get to know one another and that a little venting may occur before the work gets done.

Avoid the image of a committee meeting by calling it a task force session. Keep the room temperature at 68 degrees, try meetings where everyone stands, and serve coffee and soft drinks instead of donuts and pastries. Assess a \$10 fine on anyone receiving a cell call (money goes to charity). Keep a rubber chicken handy to throw at anyone who whines. Challenge people to say what they have to say in two minutes or less. Play jock rock music at the beginning and end of each meeting.

### **Measuring success**

How do you know when you have had a good meeting? Certainly the first sign is to accomplish your mission on time and under budget. But it's also important that those attending have a positive reaction. The process can be as important as the result.

Are members of the team proud to have served? Do they take ownership in the results? Will people be eager to volunteer to be on the next task force? Is everyone better informed? Have you eliminated 'lack of communication' as a top concern on your employee surveys?

You're on track if no one wants to miss one of your meetings for fear that they will miss out on the action, the fun and the opportunity.

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