

How to Have Better Meetings

We can use Rudyard Kipling's "six friends" to help us improve our meetings along with other ideas. The six friends are:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How

Why

We can start with why, because the purpose of the meeting will drive the other five activities. We can recognize some purposes for meetings as well as group sizes.

Type	Detail	Group Size
Informational	Distribute significant information face to face	Large groups
Project management	Cover current status and near horizon tasks	Project team
Problem solving	Search for root causes, containments, and irreversible corrective actions.	Small, cross-functional team
Decision making	Decide on action	Small group, with decision making authority

Who

To some extent, our table defines who should be at the meeting. Clearly, project meetings will generally have project team members in attendance. It is wasteful to have people attend a meeting just to populate the room. Our meetings will be more successful if the meeting announcement is made multiple times, for example:

- A month before the meeting
- A week before the meeting

- A day before the meeting
- One hour before the meeting
- Five minutes before the meeting

This approach may seem “over the top,” but we have seen meetings that foundered on lack of attendance and failure to understand the meeting time.

When

We want to choose times that permit attendance by those who *must* participate in a given meeting. Additionally, we should set the terminus for the meeting to be as early as possible, such that we can release participants to other activities and to eliminate the conversational fluff that seems to occupy so many meetings. We can use a timekeeper to keep the meeting on schedule. We may have to use a facilitator if the meeting is not staying on track.

How

All tools and equipment should be functional. If a speaker is setting up a projector and adjusting their computer while people file into the meeting room, they have seriously missed the boat. Meetings that achieve are hard-driven with no wasted time. Also present should be

- Any paper material required
- Pre-material should be sent via email
- Easels and whiteboards available
- The ability to put extraneous topics in a “parking lot” (capture the topic for future reference)

Where

The meeting facility should be capable of some level of isolation; that is, we should be able to shut and lock the door. The goal is eliminate interruptions. Virtual meetings have the same requirement; the participants will isolate themselves and then connect via video and/or audio to the rest of the team.

What

Real meetings always have agendas and minutes. If the meeting is not important enough to create these documents, the meeting is not important enough to hold. Remember, a meeting is a cost center. Since a meeting is a cost center, we wish to reduce the cost to a minimum while still achieving our objectives. By so doing, we convert the meeting into a lean activity where we have reduced the waste to an irreducible minimum.

Resource:

Lencioni, Patrick. *Death by Meeting: A Leadership Fable...About Solving the Most Painful Problem in Business*. Jossey-Bass, 2004.

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