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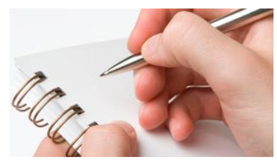
Running Meetings: Tips, Tricks, and Tactics
From agenda to meeting minutes

Writing Meeting Agendas: Tips and Tactics



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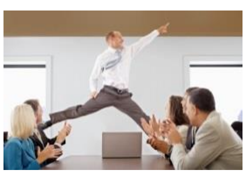
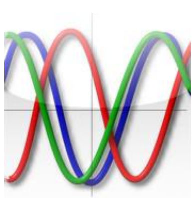


Seven Ways of Controlling the Room

Seven Tips on Running Virtual Meetings



Meeting Times Based on Circadian Rhythms

Ten Tips on Running a Successful Staff Meeting

Ten Ways to Spice Up Your Staff Meetings

Four Staff Meeting Formats

Running Meetings: Tips, Tricks, and Tactics

From agenda to meeting minutes

As a manager, your ability to run efficient and effective meetings is an illustration of your leadership ability, organizational skills, political clout, and the opportunity to dramatically move your business and professional goals forward.

This eBook, based on materials written by nationally syndicated columnist and Manager Mechanics President Eric Bloom, discusses meetings from two perspectives. First, it provides insights on ways to organize and run meetings of all types. Second, it provides specific direction on ways to lead and enhance the quality of departmental staff meetings and other ongoing gatherings over which you preside.

Meetings of all types

Staff meetings

About Us

Chapter 1
Writing Meeting Agendas: Tips and Tactics

Believe it or not, a well written agenda can enhance your meeting and help you achieve your business goals.

If done correctly, a meeting agenda can greatly enhance your meeting by:

- Setting expectation of meeting attendees
- Keeping the meeting on track in regard to discussed topics and subject matter
- Helping manage the time spent on each topic
- Allowing people to mentally prepare for the topics being discussed
- Helping you keep away from topics you don't want to discuss in the meeting (because it's not on the agenda)
- Acting as a check list to assure that all needed topics are raised during the meeting

As additional food for thought, the simple act of distributing your meeting agenda a few days prior to the meeting taking place, via the email-based invitation or other automated or manual means, has the following advantages:

- Allows meeting participants to properly prepare for the topics being discussed
- Saves people who are not interested in the topics being discussed from attending the meeting
- Helps assure that people who have a vested interest in the topics being discussed will attend your meeting
- Provides general status information to those who cannot attend the meeting as to what you are working on

With the advantages of using a meeting agenda now defined, the question is "How should an agenda be written to maximize its effectiveness?"

The first and most obvious requirement is that an agenda must clearly outline the topics that will be included in the meeting and order in which they will be discussed. This may seem like a single and straightforward task, but give careful thought as to the order that items are discussed. For example:

- If there is a topic you don't want to discuss, but are being forced to put it on the agenda, put it last, with the goal that there will not be time to discuss it before the meeting's end.
- If there is a major issue or problem facing the group, put it first. The reason is that if the issue is on everyone's mind, discussing it first clears the air, thus allowing everyone to then concentrate on the other meeting topics.

- If you want to gain agreement on a controversial topic, place it near the end of the agenda, directly after three or four non-controversial items that will win easy agreement. This technique allows the group to build a momentum of agreement, thus maximizing the possibility of a settlement on the controversial topic. This approach is commonly used as a negotiation tactic.

In addition to a list of carefully ordered topics, each topic should include a start time and purpose as illustrated in the mini-agenda below:

• Meeting begins	2:00 pm	
• Topic #1	2:00 pm	For Your Information (FYI)
• Topic #2	2:10 pm	Looking for your input
• Topic #3	2:25 pm	Decision to be made
• Topic #4	2:45 pm	Update of project status
• Meeting adjourns	3:00 pm	

Including the time in the agenda helps you keep the meeting on track. For example, if there is a person at the meeting who will not stop talking about Topic #2, at 2:25 you can politely ask them to stop so you can keep the meeting on schedule. Other advantages of including topic timing on the agenda are:

- Setting participant expectations as to how long a specific topic will be discussed
- Allowing a participant who can't attend your whole meeting enter and exit the gathering precisely when their topic is being debated
- Showing the importance of each topic based on its length of time in the agenda

The topic's purpose informs invited participants why a specific item is on the agenda. This purpose has the dual effect of setting participant expectations and helping you control the meeting. From an expectation perspective, if you state that the purpose of Topic #3 is to make a decision, then people with a vested interest in Topic #3 will be more likely to attend your meeting. Regarding keeping control of your meeting, saying Topic #1 is simply an FYI, participants will not be expecting to debate the topic, thus you can move past it quickly.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- A well written agenda can enhance your meeting and help you achieve your business goals.
- Distributing your meeting agenda a few days prior to the meeting taking place allows meeting participants to properly prepare for the topics being discussed.
- Including the time in the agenda helps you keep the meeting on track.
- The topic purpose has the dual effect of setting participant expectations and helping you control the meeting.

Chapter 2
Eight Tips for Writing Great Meeting Minutes

I don't know about you, but whenever I'm in a meeting and the leader asks who would like to take the minutes, I always try to find a reason to look down at my notebook as if I didn't hear him. I'm not a great notes taker and the task has never been on the top of my hit parade of favorite activities. That said, there are various advantages of being the note taker and simple ways to efficiently take the notes and produce the meeting minutes.

The advantages of being the official meeting note taker and producer of the minutes are:

- Everyone in the meeting may feel like they owe you a favor, making it easier to push through your personal agenda
- It's less likely that you will get other, more difficult, action items because you already have to write and publish the minutes
- The meeting will be officially documented based on your interpretation of the meeting
- It illustrates your willingness to be a team player and take on additional tasks as needed
- Demonstrates your writing ability

There are a number of things you can do to simplify the note taking process, including the following:

1. Design your meeting template prior to the meeting. This helps assure that you don't miss any important items. Generally speaking, your meeting minutes should have the following categories:
    - Date, time and meeting title
    - Name of meeting leader
    - List of meeting attendees
    - For each agenda item
        - Agenda item name
        - Discussion highlights
        - Conclusions (if applicable)
        - Action items: task, person responsible, and due date (if applicable)

2. If you don't know the names of all of the people at the meeting, pass around an attendance list. This saves you from having to spend time writing down everyone's name and saves you from asking the name of someone you should know. It also guarantees that everyone's name will be spelled correctly.
3. Use bullet points whenever possible. They are easier to write and for most people they are easier to read (if they actually read the minutes).

4. Unless required, based on the nature of the meeting, don't write down everything that was said, just highlights of the discussions, the conclusion, and the specific action items. In most meetings, almost everything else is usually worth forgetting.
5. Finalize and distribute the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting. This has the dual benefits of illustrating your professional timeliness and getting them written while the meeting is still fresh in your mind.
6. Be factual, not opinionated. Also, don't take sides in the conversation. The notes should be written from an unbiased perspective.
7. Don't try to wordsmith your notes during the meeting, it can cause you to miss an important comment that should have been recorded.
8. Lastly, if appropriate, have someone else who was at the meeting give them a quick read to be sure you didn't miss anything important or accidently report something incorrectly.

In closing and as a caution when taking notes, be careful not to include comments or discussions that are best not documented. For example, someone speaking poorly about another employee, personal (non-meeting related) items that came up in the discussion, and/or arguments between meeting participants. Unnecessarily documenting these types of items could be very embarrassing for meeting participants and bring hard feelings toward you.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- There are many advantages of volunteering to be the meeting note/minutes taker.
- There are a number of things you can do to simplify the note taking process.

Chapter 3
Seven Ways of Controlling the Room

As the leader and organizer of a meeting, it's your responsibility to make sure the meeting runs smoothly. As you may expect, running high quality and efficient meetings has many professional advantages including the following:

- People will be willing to attend your meetings
- Helps you build your professional brand as a leader
- Assist you in reaching your meeting and business objectives

The concept of "controlling the room" during a meeting is conceptually similar to what professional speakers and comedians do when trying to keep the audience engaged and focused on their presentation or comedic routine. From a meeting perspective, think of the time that you had been a participant. In some of these meetings you were fully engaged and on the edge of your seat soaking in what others were saying and trying to participate at every possible moment. Think of other meetings you attended where five minutes in you were already looking at the clock, answering emails on your smart phone, and/or pretending to take notes when you are actually writing out the next day's to-do list. What was the difference between these two types of meetings? In short, the answer was the leader's ability to engage those sitting in the room.

To properly engage meeting participants, you have to control the room, which requires the following:

1. To the extent possible, only invite people who either want to be there or have a vested interest in the meeting's outcome. This one is much easier said than done. That said, at the minimum, try not to invite people who have no interest in your topic, they can suck the energy out of the room simply with their nonchalant body language.
2. Have a crisp and well defined agenda and stick to it in regard to both time and topic.
3. Watch the room and see who is engaged and who is fading. As you see them fade, ask them a direct question to wake them up or slightly shift the discussion (within agenda topic of course) to their area of concern.
4. Use your body language in two ways, first, to give the appearance of confidence and leadership, second, to control the body language of others. Body language in itself is a big topic on its own. The take-a-way here is to learn more about body language if you are unfamiliar with the topic, it's fascinating and, if used correctly, can be of great professional value.
5. Start your meeting on time. If a key player is missing and needed for the first agenda item, reorder the agenda on the fly. This technique both illustrates to the participants that it is in their best interest to not be late as well as gives you the full allotted time to complete your agenda.

6. If someone is speaking on-and-on to the point that others in the room are looking irritated and bored, politely interrupt, thank them for the great information, offer to continue the discussion with him/her “off-line” after the meeting and move to the next speaker or topic. If done correctly, you will not offend the person speaking and you will gain the gratitude of everyone else sitting around the table. If needed, use the times listed on the agenda as the reason for the interruption.
7. Don’t be boring and/or uninterested in your own topic. As the meeting leader, your mood, body language and energy level transfers to other attendees. The more animated and excited you are on the topic the greater potential that your audience will be also. As a reverse example of this phenomenon, when someone in a room clears their throat or yawns, other people do it too. This is called transference.

In closing, these seven techniques are not an exclusive list. My suggestion to you, moving forward, is as a meeting participant, watch other leaders run their meeting. This will allow you to continually expand your leadership knowledge by observing the good and bad techniques used by others.

The primary advice and takeaways from today’s column is to know that:

- Running high quality and efficient meetings has many professional advantages.
- “Controlling the room” during a meeting is conceptually similar to what professional speakers and comedians do when trying to keep the audience engaged and focused.
- Watch other leaders run their meeting. This will allow you to continually expand your leadership knowledge.

Chapter 4
Seven Tips on Running Virtual Meetings

As time moves forward, it seems that more and more companies are creating multi-location workgroups and allowing people to work from home. As a result, new and experienced managers alike are having to learn to run meetings via speakerships, Skipe sessions, and other distance shrinking communication tools. It may sound easy, but running an effective virtual meeting is much harder than it seems because you have the following things going against you:

- People on the phone are probably multi-tasked, doing email or other activities
- People in the conference room forget that people are on the phone because they can't see them
- Meeting handouts must be emailed to remote participants prior to meeting
- Cell phones lose service and run out of batteries
- Location specific accents can be hard to understand
- People joining the call late can disrupt the flow of conversation
- Time zone differences can make it problematic to find a meeting time that is convenient for all participants

The good news is that even with all the above difficulties, virtual meetings can be run successfully and efficiently. It just takes a little planning, a little technique and a little practice.

Let's start with the planning. If your meeting participants are from different time zones, try to find a time that works best for all. I like to call this "the time of least aggravation". That is to say, the time that on average causes the least inconvenience to the participants. Ideally, no one should be forced to wake up in the middle of the night to join the call. Second, you must be sure that all of the documents that will be discussed on the call have been emailed to the participants in time to read and/or print them before the meeting. Lastly and easiest, make sure that all participants have the conference call phone number as access code.

Regarding technique, there are a number of things you can do to make the call run more smoothly, including the following:

1. If the majority of the participants are together on a conference call, place the names of those who called into the meeting on a large piece of paper next to the speakerphone. This will act as a visual reminder that people are on the phone.
2. Periodically ask specific questions to the people on the phone and require answers to assure they are paying attention.
3. If possible, if the meeting is not discussing controversial or confidential information, turn off the "beep" that sounds each time a new person is added to the call.
4. Connect privately with others on the meeting via Instant Messenger.
5. Facilitate the meeting by assuring that all those in the class have a chance to speak.

6. Minimize the chance of technical issues by distributing a list of do's and don'ts such as not placing the call on hold if your hold plays music.
7. Ask open questions with the specific intent of expanding the conversation, thus not allowing prolonged silence on the call.

With the planning done and the techniques in hand, your next step is practice. If you have been a participant in a virtual meeting, but have never been the leader, it's harder to do well than it looks. If you have never participated on a virtual meeting, try to gain firsthand knowledge of how it's done by participating in one. This first-time participation can be done in any of the following ways listed in order of preference.

- First, ask to join a virtual meeting being held within your company. If it is not a meeting you would normally attend, ask if you can quietly listen with the goal of understanding how a virtual meeting can be effectively run.
- Second, attend a free interactive webinar sponsored by a vendor in your industry. This will not only give you a sense of how virtual meetings are run, but it will also provide you the opportunity to learn something about the vendor that may help you at work.
- Third, attend a free interactive webinar on a non-work-related topic, but of personal interest. This type of interactive webinar tends to be less formal and less business-like, but should give you a good idea of how a virtual meeting is run.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- Running a successful virtual meeting is harder than it looks, but with the right planning, techniques, and practice they can done very successfully.

Chapter 5

Strategically Picking Meeting Times Based on Circadian Rhythms

When during the workday are you most energetic, wide awake, and ready to take on the world? On the other side of that coin, when during the workday would you prefer to be taking a nap to recharge your internal batteries? Enough about you, when during the workday do you think your boss, staff, clients, customers and peers are most awake or half asleep?

The answers to the previous questions can be of great value to you in regard to your staff's productivity, when negotiating with your peers and customers, and when trying to get your boss to agree to a proposal that's near and dear to your heart.

The rationale behind how this works can best be described by explaining an old business trick. The trick is to negotiate a deal with someone when you are totally mentally awake and the person you are negotiating with is at slightly less than full capacity. No, I don't mean alcohol or other mental recreational substances; I mean a delicious bowl of pasta and meatballs (actually one of my favorites).

Imagine this scenario; you bring your future client out to lunch at your favorite restaurant. Your future client, by your recommendation, orders a big bowl of pasta with turkey meatballs. Meanwhile you decide to get a big salad with light dressing with the excuse that you're watching your weight. Then, right after the meal you start negotiating the contract. Guess who's wide awake and who's a little bit sleepy? Now guess who will probably fare better in the contract negotiation?

This story illustrates the advantage of knowing your daily mental cycles and the mental cycles of those around you. Listed below are a few practical applications of this technique:

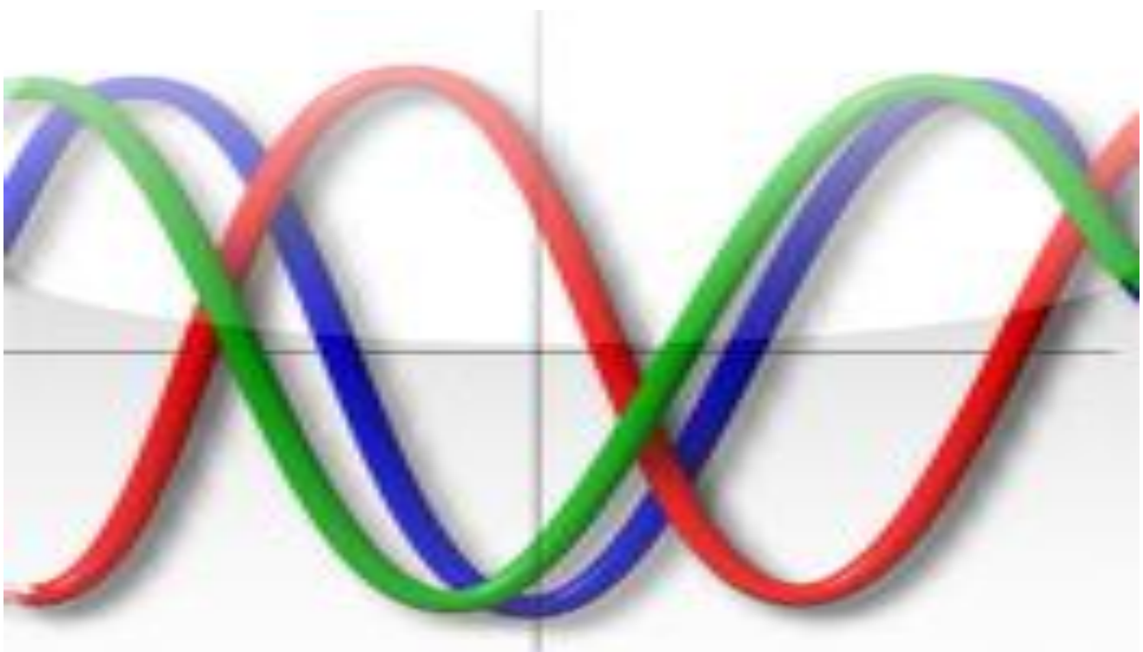
- If you would like to have a very fruitful brainstorming session with your boss on an important business issue, schedule the meeting at a time of day when both you and your boss are as mentally alert as possible.
- If you want to reduce your department's productivity loss associated with weekly staff meetings, have it at a time of day when your staff, on average, is less mentally alert, leaving their most productive time of day for work on important tasks.
- If you are negotiating with a business peer about who gets the office overlooking the ocean and who gets the office overlooking the parking lot and the dumpsters, schedule the meeting when you are most mentally alert and he/she is less focused. Alternatively, invite him/her out for a nice pasta lunch, your treat :)
- If you are interviewing for a new job over lunch with a potential new employer, be very careful what you eat to assure you are on the top of your game. Maybe even have a cup of coffee before you go.

- If you are obliged to attend committee meetings where you have no vested interest other than to make an appearance, try to schedule the meetings when you are at your lowest mental strength during the workday.
- If you are giving an important presentation to upper management or a prospective client and want them fully engaged in the conversation, try to schedule it at a time when you, the presenter, and they, the audience, are as sharp and cognitively alert as possible.

This concept/technique is by no mean foolproof, but it does have merit. My goal in teaching you this technique is not so you can take advantage of others. As seen in the above examples, (except of course for the office facing the ocean) are ways that you can increase your team's work efficiency, maximize your personal productivity, and enhance your communication with others.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- Scheduling important meetings based on the time of day that you, your staff and others are at their best and worst mentally can be used to your advantage.
- The trick is to negotiate a deal with someone when you are totally mentally awake and the person you are negotiating with is at slightly less than full capacity.
- This concept/technique is by no mean foolproof, but it does have merit.



Chapter 6
Ten Tips on Running a Successful Staff Meeting

Staff meetings are like dentist appointments. We know they're good for us, but about five minutes before the meeting you can think of about a thousand different things you would rather be doing.

That said, don't underestimate the importance of staff meetings and the very positive effect they can have on the organization. These effects include improved department communication, psychological team building, and improved group productivity. From a communication perspective, staff meetings enhance the communication from you to your staff, from your staff to you, and among your staff members. Regarding team psychology, meeting as a team helps make you feel like a team. Lastly, from a productivity perspective, the combination of increased communication and team cohesion helps create an environment that facilitates group collaboration, coordination, and innovation.

Tips to maximize your staff meeting are listed below:

1. Start your meetings on time regardless if some people are late, unless they are late for a known and preapproved business reason. This has three beneficial effects; first, it sends a message that people should arrive on time, second, it helps the meeting end on time, and third, it provides the maximum length of time to get things done.
2. Distribute a meeting agenda at least one day prior to the meeting. This will allow your staff to prepare for the meeting if needed.
3. Your meeting agenda should contain a schedule showing the amount of time to be spent on each topic. This has the dual advantage of keeping the meeting moving and allowing you to gracefully end discussion on topics because of time constraints.
4. Unless mission critical activities cannot be avoided, require staff member attendance. This has the dual benefit of showing meeting importance and increasing communication efficiency because all staff are in attendance.
5. Schedule your staff meetings for the same time and location each week. This consistency allows people to more easily attend and participate because it becomes part of the regular weekly work cadence.
6. If your meeting is in the afternoon, bring cookies or other appropriate snacks. Like Pavlov's dogs, it will help your team look forward to staff meetings because they know they will be getting a treat.
7. Schedule the meeting at a time of day that least interferes with your teams work requirements and productivity. For additional information on this tip, please refer to my blog on "Time Chunks".
8. Try to make the meeting a little fun by including a short informative and fun YouTube video on an agenda related topic. This has the dual advantage of being educational for

the team and also provides a little entertainment. Like providing snacks, it will help make people look forward to the meetings.

9. Always end your meetings early or on time. If your staff meetings have a tendency to run late, it makes it hard for your team to plan the rest of their day.
10. At the end of each meeting do a quick recap of the decisions that were made and action items that were assigned. Note that all defined action items should be assigned to a specific individual and have a specific due date. This will help ensure that the assigned action is performed.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- Don't underestimate the importance of staff meetings and the very positive effect they can have on an organization. These effects include improved department communication, psychological team building, and improved group productivity.
- The steps listed in this column can help you make your staff meetings more productive, more interesting, and a little bit fun.

Chapter 7
Ten Ways to Spice Up Your Staff Meetings (Part 1)

Wow, there is nothing like a good weekly staff meeting to get the creative juices going and the work intensity flowing. I bet that as your reading this column you're thinking fondly and nostalgically about last week's meeting and you just can't wait for the next staff meeting coming up in just a few days. Oh boy, it will be fun, exciting, inspirational, and an altogether great time!

Oh, your staff meetings are not like this. Don't feel bad, neither are anyone else's.

We all know that staff meetings are an important vehicle for coordinating team activities, informing your staff about critical company information, and as a way to build team cooperation and cohesiveness. So if they are so important why make them a necessary evil rather than at least a pseudo-interesting experience. The following ten ideas can help you make your staff meetings a little more tolerable and maybe a little fun.

1. Department book club
By book club, I don't mean that latest action thriller or tear jerker, I'm referring to non-fiction business-oriented books related to the work your department performs. For example, if you are the VP of Human Resources, your books could be in the area of organizational design, talent management, salary and benefits, and other related topics. If you are the VP of Information Technology, your books could be on the various IT mega-trends, such as cloud computing, big data, Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), computer security and other related topics.

The way the book club works is that your team members are asked to read different books on a rotating schedule, having one member of your staff present a different book's key points each week. For example, if you have eight people in your department, each person would be responsible for giving a book presentation once every eight weeks.

This approach has two valuable benefits for the members of your department. First, your team is learning new key concepts related to their profession on a weekly basis. Second, it provides the opportunity for your staff to practice their presentation skills on an ongoing basis.

For you as the manager, the book club also has two key advantages. First, it provides you the opportunity to train your staff on an ongoing basis at no financial cost. Second, it has the potential to bring new concepts into your group that may be of value to implement within your department.

2. Video of the week

The video of the week is a short video, most likely from YouTube, on a business topic related to your group. It could be used as a vehicle to enhance your team's knowledge on a new technology, new government legislation, industry trend, or any other topic that you deem appropriate for your group. As an alternative to individual YouTube videos, it could be MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) shown one short video a week over an extended length of time. For example, if you are the VP of Marketing, you could use ten minutes of each weekly staff meeting to show a class segment on gamification, social media marketing, or big data analysis. Note that MOOC based classes are also free of charge.

3. Cartoon corner

If you are a cartoon enthusiast, spend a fun weekend collecting copies of your favorite cartoons from your local Sunday newspaper or online source. Then, have it as an official agenda item on your staff meeting and show one cartoon each week. It's quick, it's easy and it makes your staff meetings at least a little bit of fun. The only thing to consider regarding reprinting cartoons is to make sure that you have permission to do so legally.

4. Vendor Presentation

Vendor presentations are a great way to learn more about the products your team is using and/or supporting. Generally speaking, vendors appreciate the opportunity to present the new features in their latest products, the better ways to work with their company via the website, or just to do a question and answer session. If the vendor is located in another city or their allotted presentation time is too short to make it worth their while to attend in person, consider connecting them in via Skype or other online/webinar type tool. Also, vendor presentations are free of charge. My one suggestion, in fairness to the vendor, if you bring a vendor in to do a presentation, please make sure they know it's informational and not a sales call.

Make sure to read next week's column to learn about suggestions 5 through 10.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- Staff meetings provide great value, but are generally not much fun.
- The suggestions described in this column can help enhance the value of your staff meetings to you, your team, and the company in general.

Chapter 8
Ten Ways to Spice Up Your Staff Meetings (Part 2)

In last week's column, I discussed the importance of staff meetings and how they can easily bore you to tears in the process. Then, I went on to describe the first four of my ten suggestions on how to make your staff meetings more interesting, informative, and maybe a little bit fun.

In this week's column, I'd like to continue on last week's theme and give you suggestions five through ten.

5. Company executive visits
Asking internal executives from other parts of your company to speak at your staff meetings has a number of great benefits. First, it gives your staff the chance to learn what's going on in different parts of the company. Second, it provides a forum for your staff to meet and ask questions of senior company leaders. These questions could be about company growth, clients, policies, and other company-oriented topics. This deeper understanding of the company in general, can, in turn, help your department better understand its role within the company and thus provide better internal service.

Another advantage of inviting senior company leaders to your staff meetings is that it gives you a reason to contact them under the best possible circumstances. You are, in effect, calling them to say that you think they are very important to the company and have interesting things to say. From a political perspective, this gives you a chance to gain favor with these executives which may be of advantage to you at a future time.

6. Client/customer stories
People who work in internal functions, such as Information Technology (IT), Human Resources (HR), and Finance, of large companies very often never see or hear about the company's actual clients. If you work in one of these types of functions it's easy to forget about what your company does and what services it provides to its paying customers. Asking someone from the Sales or Client Service group to speak at your staff meeting can bring real meaning as to what your company does and the role your department plays in your company's product offerings. As an example, if you work within IT supporting the hospital's patient records, having a nurse tell your group a story about how an analysis feature in the software saved the life of a patient can bring a feeling of great purpose to your department's work.

7. Virtual pizza
If you manage a virtual team, all of which are in the same time zone, say in Boston, New York, Washington DC, and Miami, have a noon-time staff meeting and order Domino's pizza for all four locations. Then, strike up a conversation on the conference call about who likes which type

of the pizza the best. Not only does it bring a non-business shared experience to the group which increases team cohesion, but everyone is getting free pizza!

8. Foods of the world

In the second food example, say you have offices in Boston and London, have a joint staff meeting that's approximately lunch time in Boston and dinner time in London. Then, from a food perspective, serve Boston type food in London and London type food in Boston. For example, in Boston serve fish and chips and in London serve New England clam chowder and lobster. This not only gives a great opportunity for discussion between the groups, but it's also a learning opportunity to gain knowledge on each other's culture.

9. Product Presentations

These are presentations of your company's products and services made by a company salesperson or marketing person. The concept here is that it's of value for everyone working within a company to understand the company's products. This knowledge can help your department better understand its role in the company, help understand how your company competes with its competition, and increase the sense of pride and loyalty that your team has toward the company in general.

10. Rotating leader

The rotating leader concept is that a different member runs the meeting each week. The advantage of this approach is threefold. First, it adds variety to your staff meetings because someone different is leading each meeting. Second, it gives each team member experience running meetings. Lastly, it provides you, as their manager, the opportunity to observe and evaluate your staff's ability to run a meeting and lead their peers.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- You can expand your team's knowledge about your company via company executive visits, client/customer stories, and demos of your company's products.
- You can enhance your department's cohesiveness and teamwork by providing different types of food at your staff meetings.
- Rotating the leader of your staff meeting, helps your team grow by given them experience leading a group.

Chapter 9
Four Staff Meeting Formats (Part 1)

The format used to run your staff meetings can have a dramatic effect on their ability to:

- Communicate important information to your team
- Gain an understanding of issues affecting your department's productivity
- Build team cohesion and interpersonal communication
- Enhance organizational effectiveness
- Make you look like a competent manager

There are certainly many other factors that affect the above departmental and personal goals, don't underestimate the power of well-run staff meetings to forward your departmental objectives and professional ambitions. Your staff meeting is the one place per week when your entire staff is able to collectively observe your leadership, organizational, managerial, and interpersonal style and capabilities. As a result, taking your staff meetings seriously, as a place to get things done, enhance your group's capabilities, and as a venue to illustrate your leadership prowess.

There are various ways to run a staff meeting. I like to classify them in four ways. When reviewing these meeting types, note that they go from less-structured to more-structured and each have their own advantages and disadvantages.

Hey, Let's Get Together and Talk About Stuff
This type of staff meeting is totally unstructured, has no specific agenda, and has no specifically defined topics and/or action plans. The advantage of this type of staff meeting is that it requires no up-front planning or forethought, your just show up and ask everyone "What's going on?" The downsides of this meeting type, however, are substantial and include the following disadvantages:

- Important topics that should be discussed are forgotten and thus not discussed.
- Your team has no real idea of how long the meeting will run, therefore, making it harder to plan their workday.
- As the manager, you look very unprepared. This observation by your staff can easily erode your team's respect and trust of your leadership.
- Your seemingly lack of interest in your staff meeting's value and importance will cause them to follow your lead and think of the meetings as unneeded and a waste of time.

Once-Around-the-Room
This type of staff meeting is as it sounds. Namely, you go around the room one-by-one and everyone gets a turn to talk. During this time they can talk about project status, business issues,

or anything else of importance that comes to mind. The meeting ends when you have gone all the way around the room and everyone has had a chance to speak.

Like the previous meeting type, this type of meeting requires no preparation, but feels much more organized and structured. Additionally, because everyone coming to the meeting knows that they will be required to speak, they will be at least somewhat prepared, so as not to look unorganized in front of their peers and boss. Another advantage of this approach is group communication. That is to say, not only is everyone speaking, but everyone is also listening. As a result, everyone on your team gets to learn what everyone else is doing, which facilitates enhanced team coordination, group project ownership, and teamwork.

The downside of this type of meeting format is that:

- Not everyone has something of importance to say every week. As a result, people either elaborate on unimportant items, which wastes time, or simply pass and say nothing.
- Some people don't know when to stop talking and go on-and-on until told to stop. This can be embarrassing for the person speaking and painful for everyone who is listening and trying to be polite.
- If multiple people are working on the same project, after the first person speaks, all others working on the same project have very little to say.

When I use this meeting format, as the manager, I like to go last. That way I can comment on what was said, bring up items of importance that were missed, and ensure the meeting ends on a positive note.

In next week's column we'll discuss the next two meeting types, Weekly Specific Agenda, and Standard Weekly Agenda as well as how these various meeting types can be used in combination to maximize staff meeting effectiveness.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- Your staff meetings can have a dramatic effect on your department's effectiveness and personal professional success.
- Different meeting type formats have different advantages and disadvantages.

Chapter 10
Four Staff Meeting Formats (Part 2)

Last week's column described how your staff meetings can have a dramatic effect on your department's effectiveness and personal professional success. It also described the first two staff meeting formats, "*Hey, Let's Get Together and Talk About Stuff*" and "*Once-Around-the-Room*".

In this week's column, I'll be describing the third and fourth meeting formats, "*Weekly Specific Agenda*", and "*Standard Weekly Agenda*".

Weekly Specific Agenda
This staff meeting format is designed to be both structured and flexible because your staff has input into each week's agenda. This meeting type is best described through an example. Let's say that your group's staff meetings are on Fridays. As an aside, you picked Friday for three reasons:

- It's a good time to get debriefed from your staff about the week's activities before their memories begin to fade over the weekend.
- By Friday afternoon everyone is tired and moving a little slower than the rest of the week, therefore, having a staff meeting doesn't materially affect your department's productivity.
- It's a good time to assign/delegate new tasks to your staff to begin the following Monday.

Back to our Weekly Specific Agenda. On Wednesdays, you send an email to your staff asking them what specific items they would like to add to the agenda, based on their work, general business issues, or other items of value. Then, you combine the following three types of topics to create that week's agenda:

1. Standard weekly topics, such as budget status, upcoming vacations, project status and other "every week" type items
2. Topics you would like to add to the agenda, due to company announcements, upcoming new projects, new hires, etc.
3. Lastly, the topics suggested by your staff in Wednesday's email

There are many advantages to this staff meeting format including the following:

- It has a formalized structure, showing forethought and, thus, illustrating staff meeting importance.
- It contains both standard/weekly and current topics, providing both continuity and timeliness.

- Because your staff has input into the agenda, they will be personally invested in the topic and prepared to discuss it.
- It brings issues to the forefront that, as the manager, you may not have been aware of.

As a final thought on this meeting type, putting the topics suggested by your staff last has the strategic advantage of helping you speed through the first two segments of the meeting (standard items and your topics) because your staff will want sufficient time to discuss their suggested items.

Standard Weekly Agenda
This last of the four meeting types, Standard Weekly Agenda, has a fixed weekly format and standardized topics. In essence, it's simply the first part of the Weekly Specific Agenda meeting type. The issue with this type of meeting is that it can begin to feel very stale. Additionally, as important business arises, it will need to be discussed at your meeting. As a result, this type of meeting, over time, tends to become more of an ad hoc version of the Weekly Specific Agenda format.

A second standardized format that falls under this category is the traditional meeting agenda, consisting of the following items:

- Call to Order
- Roll Call
- Approval of last Meeting's minutes
- Old Business (previously discussed items)
- New Business
- Adjournment

This format is generally far too formal for your run-of-the-mill staff meeting, but is ideal if you are leading an advisory committee, legal oversight, or other similar groups where attendance must be reported, formality is required, minutes must be taken and distributed, and format consistency is preferred.

Choosing a meeting format for you
My first suggestion to you is don't use the "*Hey, Let's Get Together and Talk About Stuff*" format discussed in last week's column for the reasons previously discussed. Second, if consistent formality is required, then either of the two "*Standard Weekly Agenda*" types may be your best bet. That said, for a standard general purpose staff meeting, I suggest (as you may expect) the "*Standard Weekly Agenda*", because it, as stated, provides both continuity and timeliness. I further suggest that on those weeks when you don't have the time to write a formal agenda or if you forgot to send out the email on Wednesday to solicit topics, use the "*Once-Around-the-Room*" format. This approach provides a little variety in your meetings and can be presented to the staff as an occasional format variation, rather than as being unprepared.

As a last thought on meeting format, you may find the people respond best to a specific meeting type. They may like (or dislike) a standardized format because of its predictability. They may like (or dislike) the "*Once-Around-the-Room*" format because it gives them the opportunity to speak in front of the whole group. So be watchful as to what is most effective, not just your personal preference as the department manager.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- For standard general purpose staff meetings I suggest (as you may expect) the "*Standard Weekly Agenda*", because it, as stated, provides both continuity and timeliness.
- Your staff may respond more (or less) favorably to a specific meeting format. Therefore, be watchful as to what is most effective, not just your personal preference.

Part 11
About the IT Management & Leadership Institute

The Information Technology Management & Leadership (ITML) Institute is the governing body for two IT leadership certifications:

- **Information Technology Management and Leadership Professional (ITMLP)**
- **Information Technology Management and Leadership Executive (ITMLE)**

Over the years, hundreds of people have received ITMLP and ITMLE training, taken the exam and become certified. The knowledge they have gained and the credibility it provided has been of great value to their careers and the companies they serve.

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The ITMLP Certification contains a collection of ten key IT topics designed to increase the effectiveness of new and would-be IT managers by widening their knowledge of IT. It includes techniques to enhance user satisfaction, providing insights into motivating technical professionals, and providing information on the use of various IT best-practices.

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IT executives must be more than just technical. They must have well developed people-skills, a broad business view, solid business acumen, superior communication, strong management capabilities, and exceptional leadership capacity. The ITMLE is a rigorous, down-to-earth, and practical certification program that provides a well-balanced foundation needed to bring superior competitive IT advantage to their company.

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