

# Meetings That Truly Matter

Are you drowning in unproductive staff gatherings? By following a series of tips, you stand a better chance of sparking new ideas and enthusiasm. **BY SARAH LEVITT**

So many executives that I speak with seem meeting-fatigued. Despite company cultures that encourage teams to convene, suggestions for how to make the time productive and efficient are often lacking.

Whether routine or sporadic, meetings are, at best, often viewed as vehicles for information exchange, and at worst, associated with taking time that could be better spent on the “real” work that awaits. However, bringing employees together holds the potential for so much more than mere information exchange.

It’s not uncommon for senior executives to tell me that they want more engagement from their employees. Constructed and used well, meetings have the potential to break down silos; boost morale; elicit contribution and effort, and create buy-in and accountability.

So, what would a meeting look like that’s short on time and long on productivity? Below are some tips.

**START WITH THE POSITIVE** – When you convene your team, do you begin with either a status report or what’s going wrong? In my time spent shadowing clients, I’ve noticed that most meetings begin with one of the two. While it’s natural to do so, it’s not nearly as effective as kicking off the meeting with what’s gone well since last time. It helps team members to engage rather than shut down.

Don’t be shy about specific praise – I wrote about the power of praise in a “Last Word” column that appeared in the last issue of this magazine. Team meetings are a great opportunity to give shout-outs to team members.

One senior financial executive told me he found this to be contagious among his team’s members. After he began noting the triumphs of his employees in weekly meetings, his staff were so taken by the affects that they started to positively praise one another in peer-to-peer recognition.

The executive found that his whole team



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became more dedicated to solving the challenges they were facing.

**DEVELOP BETTER PROCESSES** – How can all that positive recognition be used to become more effective as a team? Use it as an opportunity to develop best practices from the inside out.

Team members are more involved when they are actively monitoring what’s going well, what new processes worked, what experiments bore fruit. They become part of creating and developing the solution, which is key to buy-in and motivation.

**BRIDGE THE GAPS** – Silos are often a challenge at media companies. As a result, information doesn’t always flow freely within departments. And as a result, there can be inefficiencies, duplications and delays.

After doing specific shout-outs and identifying what’s working, block some time for team members to contribute their brief status reports and updates. Information will be shared in an environment that’s collaborative, which makes its transfer much more likely and productive.

**BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS** – Set aside time during the meeting to get your team’s input on the greatest challenges they face. Use this period to brainstorm and elicit their creativity and problem-solving ideas about how to tackle those issues.

Keep the focus on their ideas for improvement, rather than on the challenge itself. Resist any urge to blame, and lead with a “how can we improve together” perspective. You want more engagement? Create an environment that welcomes and expects it.

**END ON A HIGH NOTE** – Leave people inspired and equipped to go out and do their jobs exceptionally well. Don’t hesitate to finish the meeting with shout-outs for jobs well done, either individually or collectively.

In addition to those six ideas, consider some finer details. For example, send out an agenda in advance so that team members come prepared to contribute.

How long and how often are meetings? Shorter is better, and depending on the size of the team, oftentimes executives have had great success with 45 to 60 minute gatherings that meet twice per month. Consider giving this meeting a special name, one that suggests team collaboration.

Being clear about the “who, what, when and how” of any action items at the finish is also important.

It’s not unusual for my clients to institute this type of meeting during a challenging period, when they need “all hands on deck” and the very best from their employees. Many times, they find that it works so well that they continue to use it when waters are smooth again.

Make meetings work for you rather than creating more work with meetings.



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