How to Make Meetings Work

Ingredients of an effective meeting:
1. There must be a common focus on content.
2. There must be a common focus on process.
3. Someone must be responsible for maintaining an open and balanced conversational flow.
4. Someone must be responsible for protecting individuals from personal attack.
5. And, in general, for the duration of the meeting everyone’s role must be clearly defined and agreed upon.

The key to success of any meeting, regardless of how it is run, is planning and preparation. When you are planning a meeting, there are some basic questions that you need to ask:

1. Why have a meeting? What are your objectives and expectations?
2. What type of meeting do you want to have?
3. Whom do you want to attend the meeting?
4. What kind of involvement and participation do you want?
5. How many people do you want to attend the meeting?
6. Where are you going to meet? How should the room be arranged?
7. Why roles and responsibilities should individuals have during the meeting?
8. Who will have the power and authority to make decisions?
9. What methods and techniques of discussing, planning problem solving and decision-making are you going to use?
10. Will there be an agenda?
11. Will there be presentations?
12. Will there be some kind of record?
13. What are the desired outcomes of the meeting?
14. How are you going to determine task? Deadlines? And responsibilities?
Common problems encountered without formal planning:

*Multi-headed animal syndrome:* Everyone going in different directions at the same time.

*Personal attack:* Attacking individuals rather than their ideas.

*Traffic problem:* Difficulty in leaping into the conversational flow and getting a chance to participate.

*Unclear roles and responsibilities:* Who is supposed to be doing what?

*Manipulation by group leader:* Abuse of power in order to achieve personal objectives.

*Repetition and wheel spinning:* Going over the same ideas again and again

*Confused objectives and expectations:* Why did you call the meeting and what is the group supposed to be doing.

*Unresolved questions of power and authority:* Do we have the power to make this decision?

*General negativity and lack of challenge:* There is nothing that we can do about it, so why try?

*Communication problems:* Not listening to or understanding what other are saying or making faulty assumptions.

*Poor meeting environment:* Can’t hear, can’t see, too stuffy, etc.

*Personality conflicts:* Lack of openness and trust.

So…how should I run a meeting? Great question! One of the most successful ways to run a meeting is called: the **Interaction Method.** The **Interaction Method** consists of four well-defined roles. All four roles are equally important. No one person is in the traditional role of leadership; instead, everyone has a stake in the outcome and is equally responsible for the groups’ success and failures. The four roles consist of the *facilitator,* the *recorder,* the *group member* and the *manager/chairperson.*
**The Facilitator:** is a neutral servant of the group that does not evaluate or contribute ideas. They help the group focus on its energies and keeping the group on task by suggesting methods and procedures, protecting all members of the group from attack, and making sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate. The facilitator serves as a combination of tool guide, traffic officer, and meeting chauffeur. He/she is also responsible for all pre-meeting and post-meeting logistics.

**The Recorder:** is also a neutral, non-evaluating servant of the group. They are to write down the basic ideas on a large sheet of paper in front of the participants. The recorder does not edit or paraphrase, but uses the works of each speaker. The objective is not to record everything that is said but to capture enough so that ideas can be preserved and recalled at any time.

**The Group Member:** is an active participant in the meeting. They are responsible to keep the facilitator and recorder in their neutral roles and to make sure that ideas are recorded accurately. As long as the Interaction Method is running the meeting, the control of what happens rests in the hands of the group members. They can make procedural suggestions, overrule the suggestions of the facilitator, and generally determine the course of the meeting.

**The Manager/Chairperson:** does not run the meeting, but rather becomes an active participant. Otherwise, he/she retains all of their powers and responsibilities. The Interaction Method takes the ‘boss’ out of the manager.

Other suggestions:
1. Have the recorder post the meeting via-email
2. Review what the recorder has written, and set your agenda for next meeting.
3. Set your meeting time and place, before you adjourn.
4. Review and evaluate how you all thought the meeting went, suggest new ideas for next meeting.
5. Bring food and beverages to meeting.
6. Add humor!