

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

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Are your meetings effective? Here are some tips

How can you make your staff meetings more effective? First, get rid of the "old school" philosophy concerning meetings: Meet often, keep the agenda open and continue the meeting until you get problems solved.

Things have changed.

First, you should not meet unless there's a specific reason or need. Too often, meetings are held because "We've always met every Thursday afternoon." The larger your staff, the greater the burden of attendance. Employees may have to meet at the convenience of key volunteers which may conflict with your "regular" meeting. So, they juggle their schedules and, as a result, may be late for one or both meetings or may have to miss one meeting entirely.

Before you call a meeting, begin by asking yourself these three questions:

1. Why are you meeting?
2. Could an e-mail or memo do the job of a meeting?
3. Why meet at all?

Meetings are held to communicate information and make decisions. In this electronic age, it's easier, quicker and certainly more efficient to send an e-mail. Even then, you may not have to send the memo to your entire staff - just to those involved in decision-making.

To keep your whole staff informed, you might send a memo to everyone regarding a decision that was made. Electronic meetings are an enormous time-saver.

But, if you must hold a meeting, do so only after you develop an agenda, (and don't go to a meeting without one). Several days before the meeting, send the agenda to all meeting participants.

Knowing the agenda beforehand will make your staff more effective during the meeting. They will know what the topic is and have sufficient time to think about their contributions.

You should also never allow a meeting to last longer than it is scheduled. Make sure your 60-minute meetings don't last for 75 minutes. If your agenda has four items on it, but you've only covered three, don't extend the meeting beyond the allotted time to squeeze in that fourth item. Your staff has other things to do.

When you develop your agenda, prioritize it so that if you run out of time, that last item can be held till the next meeting.

Another time-waster at meetings is socializing. That is not to say there shouldn't be a certain amount of levity at meetings. There should, of course, but it must be controlled so that the fun time doesn't eat away at the productive time.

If you want a certain outcome about an issue, don't use your position to lead the meeting discussion in that direction. It may be democratic to involve everyone in the decision-making process, but if you've already made the decision, inform the staff of your decision, and deal only with issues in which they truly can participate. Your staff will be smart enough to see they've been manipulated into making the decision you want.

Finally, be sure someone takes notes or minutes of your meeting. If assignments are made during a meeting, it's important each person delegated to carry out that assignment remembers. Having documentation is everyone's "remembrance."

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