

Ever wondered why your meetings don't work?

We spend so much of our working life collaborating through meetings whether formally or through informal get togethers yet so many people complain that they spend too much time or that meetings are a waste of time.

Did you know for example that:

9 out of 10 people daydream in meetings.

60% of meeting attendees take notes to appear as if they are listening.

63% of the time, typical meetings do not have prepared agendas.

It takes less than eight seconds for an idea, suggestion, or proposal to be criticized.

Executives average 23 hours per week in meetings where 7.8 hours of the 23 are unnecessary and poorly run, which is 2.3 months per year wasted.

49% of participants considered unfocused meetings & projects as the biggest workplace time waster and the primary reason for unproductive workdays.

So isn't it about time we did something to correct these stats in our organisation and that is what this article is all about. The key to a successful meeting is about three key ingredients:

- Assembling the right people
- Helping them prepare in advance
- Ensuring a strong purpose and outcome is clear from the start

Right People

- Make sure each person has a specific role and contribution,
- Avoid duplication so attendees take responsibility,
- Be specific about the purpose of meeting,
- Give plenty of notice to avoid absentees,
- Don't rely on your own judgement of who should attend - ask others,
- Make sure you have the right decision makers there to avoid duplicating meeting

Well Prepared

- Call people in advance and explain what you need from them/ why they have been invited,
- Send out agendas and supporting documentation well in advance
- Encourage people to prepare,
- Define timings for each item so people can consolidate their thinking in advance,
- Share specific goals for meeting,

Purpose and Outcome

- Have a strong chair/ facilitator,
- Avoid tangents,
- Keep to timings,
- Summarise action points as you go,
- Keep succinct minutes and action plans
- Keep meeting short and sweet,
- Some people recommend having meeting standing up to keep focused,
- Assign roles e.g. chair/ timekeeper and minute taker,
- if you don't have the right information to form an action move on and leave that item until next meeting to avoid lengthy discussion,
- Evaluate success of meeting with the group in the last 5 minutes so you can keep improving
- Good luck using these to ensure your next meeting is smoking hot!

Is there an elephant in the room?

How confidently are you tackling the mood that inhibits progress?

People lack confidence and the skill to articulate what is wrong but often these anxieties can turn into enormous elephants in the room, when if left, can fester and mire the best of relationships and the most productive projects.

- Have you ever found yourself in any of the following situations?
- You have members who simply don't want to be there
- You are in a planning meeting and the group simply can't agree the next steps?
- One person takes over and everyone else goes quiet?

If you have experienced any of these then there most certainly is an elephant in the room.

Why don't we take action?

You've heard the phrase 'bury your head in the sand'? Well, for many, that is what they do in the vain hope that the elephant will infact wander somewhere else but it rarely does. To tackle it takes courage and is potentially risky but you ignore it at your peril.

Top tips

1. Don't pass the buck

When you get that feeling that something is amiss - don't delay or wonder -just say it, sensitively and with positive intent.

For example "I'm getting a sense that something isn't right and no-one is saying what it is. I want this to be a valuable meeting for us but there's a big hairy elephant in the room (you can ham this up if the group style allows it) and we need to work out what this is before we can go any further." From there you can either pause and ask for someone to have courage and say it like it is, or you can do an activity. Two examples are listed here but there are many ways you could tackle it..

• Use a baton (buck.)

This can be as simple as a rolled up piece of paper or more elaborate like a thinking stick. You go first by explaining what you observe and how much you would respect and value the group to share what is inhibiting them right now and leave the baton in the middle of the table.... Be courageous and wait until someone picks it up.

• Question cards

It is always useful to have a set ready in your kit bag for all sorts of occasions. [Take a look at our Pinterest Board on great questions.](#) Place the cards in a bowl or hat and ask someone to pick out a card - they have a choice to play or pass. If they choose to play then they answer the question, if they pass they can pick out a further question - but they can only do this once before the hat moves on. The questions are varied in their levels of simplicity and pressure. Once the question has been answered they then pass the hat onto a person of their choice. This game can be less pressured by pairing people up to play or by giving small groups several linked questions to answer and then feedback on. More often than not people just want the space, time and permission to express themselves.

2. Outcome focused

When you are having the important conversation it is no good going through the whole recipe, skip first to the punch line and then fill in the gaps. This means you don't waffle on; you become renowned for clear communication that gets the heart of the matter quickly.

3. Know that behind every action is a positive intent

From the school of nlp this tip is a vital one here. Believing that behind every action is a positive intent stops you from second guessing why people have acted in a particular way and building an assumed position. It frees you up to secure a positive outcome and removes the personality and negativity from the situation. This alone will enhance your communication approaches when it matters.