

How to Hold a Good Meeting

1. Start and end ON TIME! It is not polite to wait for everyone to arrive before starting, in fact that is impolite. It disrespects the courtesy that others have shown by arriving on time. Kill the concept of being "fashionably late" and get people used to having 2:00 meetings actually begin at, or very near, 2:00. And when the end time has arrived, even if the meeting didn't achieve its goals, offer people the opportunity to adjourn as they expected to, then reconvene when practical. Meetings that run overtime are evidence that the leader isn't skilled at running meetings.
2. Stay ON TOPIC! A meeting should have a purpose or it shouldn't be held. Let people know why you are meeting and what you hope to achieve. They will help you achieve it if they know what it is and why it matters. During the meeting politely acknowledge any off-topic comments and defer them to a separate meeting or time. Other items may be important but this meeting needs to achieve its own purpose first.
3. Start with an attention getter. You don't have to fire a cannon to get started but you do have to break the attention barrier appropriately. A good starter for most meetings is to loudly announce "Welcome Everyone! Let's get started." Then proceed as if you already had their attention. Those who are talking will stop if you continue to begin the meeting. If you wait for them to become quiet then you will put a chill on the entire group. Just start the meeting and let the group quiet each other.
4. Don't position anything as "before we start." If you are making housekeeping announcements, you have started. This IS part of the meeting, so get on with it. Also, do not start with a call for open comments or questions. You are the meeting's leader so LEAD! The group is waiting for you to show them direction and guide the discussion.
5. Eliminate distractions early. If a noise can be diminished by closing a door or a glare eliminated by drawing the curtains, do so right away. People won't hear your ideas if they are distracted by visuals or sounds or temperature problems. If others are talking and won't shut up, ask them politely to continue their discussion outside the room.
6. When introducing someone to address the group, tell them: why this speaker is addressing this group at this time on this topic. Don't just read their resume' and expect people to be impressed. Also, stay in place at the speaker stand until the next speaker takes over. Don't vacate the stage while they are walking forward.
7. When someone is finished addressing the group, thank them and step up to the lectern or sound the gavel for the next topic. Waiting for them to stop on their own can often lead to long awkward moments and sometimes ruin your meeting. Take the cue that the time has expired and just say, "thank you Ellen, we have run out of time. Let's continue that dialogue offline after the meeting." Audiences despise meeting chairs who don't have the courage to do what is right. Instead of being courteous to the presenter try being more courteous to the entire audience when someone runs over time.
8. Don't try to cover every topic regardless of time frame. As the meeting unfolds, judge the best use of the remaining time and cover the important items during the meeting, leaving lesser topics for later. If your meetings are always overtime, either schedule longer meetings or learn to run meetings efficiently.
9. Lighten Up! Have fun in the meeting. Don't sacrifice progress for fun, but enjoy the process. If a senior or valued attendee comes into the room during the meeting, pause and welcome them. Keep it real, don't pretend that people don't notice.
10. Respect each other's time and topic. Keep the meeting on issue and allow each person their moment in the spotlight. Hear them out, keep them timely, and then move on. Most meetings run astray over mixing too many topics into one discussion. Print your agenda and hold people to it.
11. Let people know how it went. Send a summary or recap to the attendees. Remind them of decisions that were taken, commitments made, goals agreed to and other outcomes. Document the effect of the meeting so all can see what they achieved.

"One of the universal attitudes in society today is that most meetings are a waste of time and there is no such thing as 'a good meeting.' It doesn't have to be that way. After all a 'meeting' is simply a gathering with others for a specific purpose, kind of like a ball game or a party but less physical."