

3 not-so-common ways to hold meetings



Sometimes, the best meetings follow an unconventional path. Rather than stick to an all-business agenda, some leaders experiment with different types of gatherings to encourage participants to loosen up. Examples:

1. Host a dinner party. Bernadette Loftus, head of Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group, invites about five of her managers to her office for dinner. She orders take-out from a local restaurant, and attendees enjoy dinner while chatting informally around a table.

Initially, managers felt nervous. But over time, they began to speak more freely and enjoy each other's company. Loftus has found that the meals enable guests to drop "any barriers that might be blocking the next brilliant open and candid comment."

2. Walk down memory lane. Every month, senior managers at Edwards Lifesciences convene for an unusual brown-bag lunch meeting. At each event, one of the managers delivers a slideshow about his or her life story. The presentation includes the speaker's upbringing, values, lessons learned and work history. Photos add a personal touch.

The company records these talks and downloads them on the company's intranet. This way, employees at the medical equipment firm can get a warm and fuzzy sense of their leaders—and view them as more approachable.

3. Create an instant feedback loop. Every Tuesday at 8:30 a.m., senior executives at restaurateur LTP Management Group meet to review the prior week's results and forecast the week ahead. At 9:30 a.m., they scatter to conduct a conference call with their managers. During this call, they share what they discussed in the earlier meeting and invite input from field managers. At 10:30 a.m., the executives reconvene to analyze what they just learned from their managers.

— Adapted from *Fix It*, Roger Connors and Tom Smith, Portfolio/Penguin.