

How to run better meetings and stop wasting time



Meetings are inevitable, but often end up unproductive and a waste of time. That leaves many employees and managers looking for ideas on how to run better meetings. From brainstorming to action plans, we've got all the tips for running an effective meeting.

In this BusinessManagementDaily.com article, we cover:

- How to run better meetings
- How to identify a bad meeting
- Maximizing productivity in meetings

Running successful meetings can enhance the workplace, but pointless meetings are a time-waster that makes it hard for employees to be productive. Harvard Business Review points out that it's easy to hate meetings, but meetings are sometimes extremely necessary for advancing projects. So getting meetings right, when you have them, is important.

Preparation for a meeting is 80% of the work. Preparing slides, deciding who comes, and setting the agenda is all an art that managers use to make a meeting more likely to be successful. Poor meeting management can lead to 'meeting recovery syndrome', according to an MIT [study](#).

So, instead of leaving employees tired and discouraged, use these tactics to make your next meeting influence and inspire meeting participants to do their job better.

Decipher between necessary meetings and time-wasting gatherings

Some meetings are counterproductive to team members' focus and productivity. Determining which meetings need to happen is the first step in creating high performance in your workplace.

As a manager, you don't want to waste time calling a meeting for something that could be handled in the normal workflow. If you find that meetings are dragging on, or if employees are meeting unproductively, you might consider if there's a good alternative to calling a meeting.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Will this meeting help make the company grow? If not, don't call the meeting.
- Is the meeting convenient for employees? Try to accommodate employees' schedules as much as possible when calling a meeting.
- Are subjects covered at the meeting mandatory? You should only be calling a meeting if there are matters that need immediate attention.

To avoid ineffective meetings, it's good to identify reasons why some gatherings are unproductive.

Some traits of a bad meeting include:

- **Lack of structure.** Every part of your meeting should have purpose. Don't confuse employees by calling a random meeting that beats around the bush.
- **The meeting is too long.** There is nothing that lowers employee morale more than a boring meeting. Keep it simple and upbeat to keep employees happy and learning.
- **Unnecessary employees attending.** Avoid lurkers by being selective about who you invite to the meeting.
- **Unproductive.** Make sure you pack every last detail into your meeting to avoid wasting precious time.

Consider alternatives to a meeting

Sometimes meeting in person isn't possible, or isn't the preferred option. In that case, it's best to find an alternative. Here are some ideas for good meeting alternatives to help employees stay productive while getting your point across at the same time:

- **Casual conversation.** Instruction and organization don't always come in a formal meeting. Casual conversations are an extremely effective way to help direct operations while keeping everyone working.
- **One-on-ones.** Instead of pulling the whole staff away from the focus, you could try scheduling a time for each employee to meet individually. This is a good way to get everyone's true opinion on the subject matter at hand.
- **Email notifications.** If the purpose of the meeting is to simply inform employees of changes/needs happening in real-time, you could simply set up an email instead of wasting company time. Letting employees mull over guidelines, changes, and other company information on their own time creates a path for productivity to flourish while getting the message out at the same time.

- **Virtual meetings.** Great team meetings are possible virtually, but there lies a much more difficult task of keeping employees on task. When meeting virtually with multiple people, employees might be easily be distracted by their pets, surroundings, other people, their face on the screen, etc... so we suggest meeting virtually one-on-one or in small groups unless it's a highly engaging topic.
- **Video presentations/tutorials.** In remote work, virtual meetings can be substituted with video tutorials and online training. For example, if there's a work task on the laptop that needs completion, but an employee doesn't know how to do it, you could record a video screenshot of you performing the task while explaining it at the same time.

Steps for running a better meeting

If you decide that a meeting is appropriate, then you'll want to do it sensibly and productively.

Decide who's coming

Let's face it, as much as you want to bring the whole work-family around the campfire, it's not smart to pull some employees off-task to sit in for a meeting that doesn't necessarily apply to them.

You can send meeting invites through email or text message to selected employees for efficient planning, and don't feel bad for leaving other employees at work. Some hard-working employees loathe meetings because it distracts them from the task at hand.

Are you afraid of insulting employees by not inviting them to the meeting? That's understandable. One way you can keep all employees at bay is by kindly explaining that meetings must be separated between teams to maintain a positive workflow. There's nothing worse than covering topics that don't apply to certain employees in the meeting. You want all employees as engaged in the meeting as possible, so avoid lurkers at all costs.

Distribute an agenda

What type of meeting do you want to take place? If you can define finite reasons for your work pause, it's bound to be a productive session. Take into consideration that you're pausing the operation to call a meeting, and write meeting notes in a checklist so you don't waste time scrambling for topics. Be as clear as possible straight out the gate when unveiling what the meeting is about. Don't leave employees in the dark by not setting expectations.

You also need to let anyone coming to the meeting what the agenda is before they come — that way they can prepare themselves too. Do some heavy research on meeting topics before getting the team together. Remember, you want to be an expert on the subject at hand. Other team members may be more experienced on the topic, but you should have enough background knowledge to be able to lead a discussion and have a productive conversation.

Solicit questions

A good way to create a good meeting is to ask employees to be prepared with questions before the meeting starts. You want to hear from every employee at your meeting. Once you hear everyone's opinion, you'll be able to make better decisions after the fact.

Send out an email before your meeting, and ask your employees to arrive with some questions and comments. Rather than letting your meeting spin out of control due to employee feedback, set aside a timed portion of the meeting where employees can share opinions and ask questions. And try to get everyone's feedback. Sometimes the introverts have the most to say but are less likely to speak up in a large group. Make sure to go to each employee and give them an opportunity to provide feedback. If it's a large meeting, you could ask

employees to submit their questions either digitally or on note cards to keep things orderly.

If you can't get to everyone's questions at the meeting, clarify that you are happy to discuss any issues one on one as to not waste time focusing on one employee's direct problem.

Stay on topic

Meeting without a reason is a time-waster. Meetings should have a distinct motive or else there's no reason for getting the team together.

The only exception for not having a reason for a meeting is if the company meets once every week. Weekly meetings generally involve a bit more social interaction and are often focused on general updates. These more casual meetings can be valuable for keeping teams up to date, but shouldn't go entirely off the rails with no focus.

Be punctual — Meet and end on time

Don't set a bad example by not being punctual at your meeting. Respect your employees' time by letting them know what time and day the meeting is and what time it will end. You should have a rough estimate of how much working time and potential money the company is losing while employees are meeting — this will help keep meetings meaningful and punctual.

Always make sure employees are punctual when setting meeting times. Latecomers are a real drag, but try to reprimand them without humiliating them. Just because someone was late to the meeting doesn't mean you have to pick on them, and that might actually create some unwanted resentment in the workplace.

On the other hand, you can reward employees for coming on time with a candy bar or some other incentive for being on time or presenting something valuable at the meeting.

Don't allow discussions to wander

Set some ground rules before you start the meeting. If you tell the employees that you don't want them to give feedback until after you give your spiel, it helps you get your point across smoother without causing conflict. This is especially true in larger meetings that can easily get off track, so lay out the rules upfront so that employees know the ropes.

One way you could prevent a wandering meeting is by keeping employees busy with note-taking assignments. Employees are less likely to fall off-task if they are required to closely note what the speaker is talking about, and it also increases comprehension. Don't let employees come into the meeting with the expectation of falling asleep in boredom. Keep the meeting entertaining enough that your employees stay awake and aware.

Don't tolerate naysayers

Nothing is more toxic than people who say that something can't be done. Aside from the fact that it's not healthy to be negative, naysayers tend to be a drain to the meeting.

It's always good to consider Murphy's Law (anything that can go wrong, will go wrong) when you run meetings, but being negative doesn't help accomplish anything. Start your meeting by encouraging positive feedback from employees, and let them know to give negative feedback in a nice way without being counterproductive.

Dealing with [negativity](#) is easier said than done, but the best way to deal with negative members of a meeting is by killing them with kindness. Don't over-obsess with a negative problem. Instead, confront it head-on with a positive attitude and a solid plan.

Learn how to say 'no'

Don't be afraid to say 'no'. Saying 'no' is hard, especially when you're an enthusiastic person. But try doing it in your next meeting, if anything just to analyze how your employees react. Often you may feel bad saying no, but if an idea isn't practical or can't be done, then you shouldn't waste more time discussing it. Instead, simply note that the idea isn't feasible right now, but you appreciate the thought, and continue on with the discussion.

It's okay to take feedback and go a different direction in a meeting, but don't let it get out of control by being a 'yes' person and refusing to shut anything down. However, don't say no in a negative way. Try to maintain a positive outlook while also limiting the meeting to certain parameters.

Team-building exercises

Use team-building exercises to create productive meetings. There are countless team-building exercises, and if you can't find one specific to your field of work, you could try a quick Google [search](#) for a plethora of ideas. Basically, you want employees to collaborate well with each other, and getting them together for games and activities is sometimes a good way to do it.

Team building exercises help management better understand who plays nice together and recognize employees who should be separated for better productivity, whether it's because they don't get along or they have too much fun.

Feeding employees

Is food a good contributor to helpful meetings? We say yes, but don't let food get in the way of the topic. If anything, feed all employees before the meeting starts, that way everyone is happy and ready to digest the new information that's about to be presented.

In summary

Now it's time to plan your meeting. In this article, we learned some valuable traits of staying productive when gathering employees around. The elements of a good meeting include:

- Having an end goal
- Staying on task
- Positivity
- Employee feedback

Lastly, don't forget to follow up with meeting agenda items after the meeting is over to analyze whether or not the meeting was effective. Just like you can prepare yourself for a great meeting, you can look back on previous meetings to make the next one even better.