

# One Way to Run A Productive Meeting

## Roles in a Meeting

### Facilitator

The main role of a facilitator is to keep the group focused on the same problem at the same time in the same way. The facilitator must be prepared before a meeting, otherwise the effectiveness diminishes. S/he should review the agenda and think of the best way to accomplish the goals of the agenda. At the meeting, the facilitator maintains focus on agenda. The facilitator should try to remain neutral. If s/he wants to participate in discussion, s/he should make it clear that s/he is stepping out of role as facilitator temporarily. The facilitator also elicits participation from others and protects other members from personal attack.

You can also experiment with this role as a responsibility that rotates between all members, or between just a few. The next meeting's facilitator could be chosen at the end of the previous meeting, by lottery, by an individual's desire to do the job, or perhaps on a rotational schedule. This mechanism help to prevent the condition that one person becomes merged with the position and the possible corruption that can happen.

### Note-taker

The main role of the note-taker is to keep an accurate record of what happened at the meeting. Records what decisions were made, how they are to be accomplished, and who is responsible.

### Blackboard note-keeper

In certain discussions, especially when a lot of ideas are being generated, it is especially useful to have someone keep notes of what is being discussed on a blackboard or on large pieces of paper. This helps the group focus on the task at hand.

### Time-keeper

Each agenda item should have a time limit, agreed upon before- hand by the group. The time-keeper reminds the group frequently how much time is left for the discussion of a particular item.

### Vibes-watcher

Group discussions can sometimes become very heated. All group members should be aware of the vibes in the room. One person can be designated as vibes-watcher and lighten things up when necessary.

### Group Members

The rest of the group also has responsibilities in making meetings more productive. A group member should respect and listen to other members' views and should not speak out of turn. A group member should also be aware of other people's roles in a meeting and remind them when they step out of their roles.

## Sample Format of a Meeting

- 1) Facilitator, note-taker, and time-keeper should introduce themselves and define their roles. This will let people know what to expect of them.
- 2) General introduction between all members: Make newcomers, or infrequent members feel welcome by having everyone introduce themselves, or do a 'check in' with all present - how is everyone feeling before the meeting? This is good to do at all meetings
- 3) Brief agenda intro (written on blackboard and/or give everyone copies of agenda, or use a single copy that everyone can add to and see) Include time limits (if nec.) and who's responsible for each item. Allow everyone to include items on the agenda.
- 4) Approve/revise agenda and time limits.
- 5) Review previous week's meeting. Any items not taken care of? Follow up.
- 6) For each agenda item, first define, then discuss:
  - a) CONTENT = what is discussed (topic or problem)
  - b) PROCESS = how the topic is discussed (ie, brainstorming, go-around, presentation)
  - c) RESOLUTION = is a decision needed or are we just discussing? If a decision is necessary, define what kind of decision will be made (ie, consensus, voting)
  - d) ACTION = record what action was decided on, who is responsible, and the date by which they have to accomplish the action
- 7) Summarize meeting (note-taker) and make sure everyone agrees on what happened.
- 8) Set roles and agenda for next meeting.
- 9) Evaluate meeting.
- 10) Closure: Do some sort of formal ending of the meeting (a poem, a song, a reading, a 'check out' where each person says something; how the meeting went, what they're up to next,

## Before next meeting

- 1) review meeting
- 2) follow up on action items

## Further suggestions

Some useful strategies in meetings involve asking members what they are interested in doing right at the outset of a meeting (this is often best to do at the first meeting, or one with many new members -- What is their interest? Why did they join? What do they hope to accomplish with this group?)

Often the facilitator falls into the role of being the focal point for the meeting. This can be useful to get things moving, but don't be afraid to have other members answer questions. Allow there to be 'dead time' after a statement or question so that others can participate. Try to avoid becoming, The One That Everyone Looks To For Answers, or The Fearless Leader.

Another good trick: When someone is speaking they often look at the facilitator. Avoid their eye contact and look at other members of the group. This will help the speaker to refocus and look at other people, thus including them in the discussion. If someone asks you (the facilitator) a question, return the question to other members of the group, perhaps they can answer it better than you can.

This is only one workable format. I'm sure there are many variations on this format that may be more suited to your group. Good books exist on how to run meetings. It would be worth anyone's while to look them up and read them.

Running a meeting is a skill that is only improved by practice. It's also a skill everyone in a group should learn. If group members change roles each meeting, it will develop everyone's skills as well as give people more empathy to the difficulties of playing different roles.