# Hustle For Humanity: Running A Meeting

## Establishing an Objective and Sticking to It

There are good meetings and there are bad meetings. Bad meetings drone on forever, you never seem to get to the point, and you leave wondering why you were even present. Effective ones leave you energized and feeling that you've really accomplished something.

So what makes a meeting effective?
- ✓ They achieve the meeting's objective.
- ✓ They take up a minimum amount of time.
- ✓ They leave participants feeling that a sensible process has been followed.

## The Meeting's Objective

An effective meeting serves a useful purpose. This means that in it, you achieve a desired outcome. For a meeting to meet this outcome, or objective, you have to be clear about what it is. Too often, people call a meeting to discuss something without really considering what a good outcome would be.

- ✓ Do you want a decision?
- ✓ Do you want to generate ideas?
- ✓ Are you getting status reports?
- ✓ Are you communicating something to the group?
- ✓ Are you making plans?
- ✓ **Do you have a purpose for meeting?**

Any of these, and a myriad of others, is an example of a meeting objective. Before you do any meeting planning, you need to focus your objective.

To help you determine what your meeting objective is, complete this sentence:
- ✓ *At the close of the meeting, I want the group to ...*

With the end result clearly defined, you can then plan the contents of the meeting, and determine who needs to be present.

## Use Time Wisely

Time is a precious resource, and no one wants their time wasted. With the amount of time we all spend in meetings, you owe it to yourself and your team to streamline the meeting as much as possible. What's more, time wasted in a meeting is time wasted for everybody attending.

Starting with your meeting objective, everything that happens in the meeting itself should further that objective. If it doesn't, it's superfluous and should not be included.  Try to stay on track throughout the meeting.  A role can be designated as the mediator to "pull anyone back" that gets distracted from the topic at hand.

# Prepare an Agenda

To ensure you cover only what needs to be covered and you stick to relevant activities, you need to create an agenda. The agenda is what you will refer to in order to keep the meeting running on target and on time. It should be prepared in advance and sent to the individuals who will be running the meeting in advance so the agenda is understood. Sticking to the agenda is crucial for a successful meeting. After the meeting, a recap of the agenda with meeting topics and decisions should be forwarded to attendees of the meeting for their reference.

**To prepare an agenda, consider the following factors:**
- ✓ Priorities – what absolutely must be covered?
- ✓ Results – what do need to accomplish at the meeting?
- ✓ Participants – who needs to attend the meeting for it to be successful?
- ✓ Sequence – in what order will you cover the topics?
- ✓ Timing – how much time will spend on each topic?
- ✓ Date and Time – when will the meeting take place?
- ✓ Place – where will the meeting take place?

With an idea of what needs to be covered and for how long, you can then look at the information that should be prepared beforehand. What do the participants need to know in order to make the most of the meeting time? And, what roles are they expected to perform in the meeting, so that they can do the right preparation?

If it's a meeting to solve a problem, ask the participants to come prepared with a viable solution. If you are discussing an ongoing project, have each participant summarize his or her progress to date and circulate the reports amongst members.

Assigning a particular topic of discussion to various people is another great way to increase involvement and interest. On the agenda, indicate who will lead the discussion or presentation of each item.

Use your agenda as your time guide. When you notice that time is running out for a particular item, consider hurrying the discussion, pushing to a decision, deferring discussion until another time, or assigning it for discussion by a subcommittee.

An important aspect of running effective meetings is insisting that everyone respects the time allotted. Start the meeting on time, do not spend time recapping for latecomers, and, when you can, finish on time. Whatever can be done outside the meeting time should be. This includes circulating reports for people to read beforehand, and assigning smaller group meetings to discuss issues relevant to only certain people.