



Extension FactSheet

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Participating in Meetings

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Meetings are the awkward social rituals that organizations put their people through in the hope that they might productively collaborate.

— Michael Schrage in *No More Teams!*

Let's face it: Meetings are a part of organizational life. Meetings can and should be productive. A key to productivity is having the right tools. Here are a variety of tools that are useful in managing meetings. Different tasks require different tools. As you prepare your meeting tool kit, select tools that are appropriate for the task at hand.

Tools for the Meeting Facilitator

Plan

As the person responsible for the meeting, do your homework. The best way to manage a meeting is to be prepared. See Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet LC-01-02 for step-by-step suggestions for planning a meeting.

Starting Well

First impressions are important and meetings are no exception. Tricks for a positive beginning to your meeting include:

- Greet people as they enter the room.
- Select a room arrangement that fits the purpose of the meeting.

- Post the meeting purpose and agenda to keep everyone focused.
- Allow an opportunity for the agenda to be reviewed and modified as necessary.

Ground Rules

Consider posting a list of guidelines by which the group will function. Or take some time for the group to develop its own rules. By having the Ground Rules posted, the responsibility for the progression of the meeting rests with the entire group. Examples of ground rules:

- Be respectful of one another.
- Stay on task.
- Have fun.

Parking Lot

This handy tool provides a means of capturing those comments that notoriously enter the conversation and lead the group onto a tangent. Take a sheet of flip chart paper, write Parking Lot across the top and post the sheet in a convenient place. As random, unrelated thoughts and ideas emerge, note them on the Parking Lot.

To make this tool successful, the Parking Lot items must be reviewed near the end of the meeting. Check off those items that are no longer an issue. Remaining items can be given as assignments and/or placed on the agenda for a future meeting.



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Facilitation Skills

Keeping a meeting moving, reaping the knowledge and harnessing the energy of the group can happen. You just need the right skills. Check out Ohio State University Extension's web page, *Building Dynamic Groups*, at www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~bdg. You will find a multitude of activities, tools, and skills for a variety of purposes.

Use the Agenda

The agenda is the map of the meeting. Following the agenda will get you to the desired outcome. Remember, the agenda should be posted so as the meeting progresses everyone has the opportunity to refer to the agenda. This places with the meeting participants the responsibility to follow the items as closely as possible, pay attention to the time allocations for each item, and stay on task.

Closing the Meeting

A good closing can be just as important as a good opening. Things to keep in mind as the meeting draws to a close:

- Review the Parking Lot.
- Review open items created during the meeting and determine their future and how they will be handled.
- Assign tasks. Items that need to be accomplished should be assigned specifically with a due date.
- End on time. People fade quickly when a meeting extends beyond the stated ending time. Items on the agenda that have not been covered should be moved to the front of the next meeting's agenda or handled in a manner acceptable to the group.
- Say "Thanks!" End meetings on a positive note.

Tools for the Meeting Participants

Each member of the group has the responsibility for keeping the meeting on task. In accepting that responsibility, participants must:

- **Be Present.**

You were included because of the talent and energy you bring to the meeting purpose. To share these with the group, you must be present not only physically but also mentally.

- **Be Prepared.**

Do your homework. Study the agenda. Read the materials provided in advance. Follow up on an assignment. Such pre-work reduces the amount of wasted meeting time and increases the productivity of the group.

- **Be Purposeful.**

Treat the meeting like it matters. Participate. Help keep the meeting on task. Stay focused on the meeting purpose and how your contributions aid the group in accomplishing that purpose.

Tools for All Connected with the Meeting

Finally, some basic ground rules to carry with you to any meeting:

- Be adaptable.
- If you don't know, say so.
- Trust the resources of the group.
- Honor each group member.
- Be yourself.

For information on managing a meeting after the meeting is over, please see Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet LC-03-02.

For Additional Information

For additional information, visit the Ohio State University Leadership Center's site at:

<http://leadershipcenter.osu.edu>

References

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- Schrage, M. 1990. *No More Teams! Mastering the Dynamics of Creative Collaboration*. New York: Currency Doubleday.

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