

# PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS

Productive meetings follow a standard format. By following a set plan, time is spent more efficiently and everyone who attends has a similar expectation of the meeting. Standard elements of a meeting format include:

- ✚ Clearly defined roles,
- ✚ A set timed agenda prepared ahead of time,
- ✚ Meeting ground rules that have been agreed upon by the team.

## Building a Good Agenda

The agenda is an important part of your meeting. It should be sent out and reviewed by the team members before the meeting so that all members are prepared for the work that is expected to be accomplished. Items of work for the meeting are listed and assigned to responsible persons so that every member of the team knows what information he/she is responsible to bring to the meeting. During the first part of the meeting, meeting roles are clarified/assigned. This helps you to stay on task before you get started.

Follow-up tasks are never assigned to absent team members because it doesn't allow for discussion or true ownership of the task. If someone is unable to attend meetings, but is willing to take on a task, that should be announced to the team only if a firm commitment is made by the absent team member. The recorder lists the specific action/items and persons responsible for each item in the minutes of the meeting. This list is used to generate the agenda for your next meeting and helps you team know who to follow up with for action items. Every meeting should be evaluated for its effectiveness. This should happen the last few minutes of the meeting. Those scoring should be prepared to express why they scored in the way they did. Using a scale of 0-10 with 10 being the best meeting ever and describing what went well and what could be improved helps develop open communication among the team and provide feedback on the meeting process.

A Sample Meeting Agenda:

<p><b>Organization Name:</b> _____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>-Agenda-</b></p> <p><b>Department Name:</b> _____</p> <p>Day, Date: _____</p> <p>Time of Meeting: _____</p> <p>Meeting Location: _____</p>			
<b>Aim of Our Action-Learning Team:</b>			
<p><b>Leader:</b></p> <p><b>Recorder:</b></p> <p><b>Timekeeper:</b></p> <p><b>Facilitator:</b></p> <p><b>Participants:</b></p>			
Time	Method		Aim/Action
		<p><b>Clarify Objectives</b></p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p>	
		<p><b>2. Review Roles</b></p> <p>Leader:</p> <p>Recorder:</p> <p>Timekeeper:</p> <p>Facilitator/Advisor:</p>	
		<p><b>3. Review Agenda</b></p>	
		<p><b>4. Work Through Agenda Items</b></p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>C.</p> <p>D.</p>	
		<p><b>5. Review Meeting Record</b></p>	
		<p><b>6. Plan Next Agenda</b></p>	
		<p><b>7. Evaluate Meeting</b></p>	

## Examples of Meeting Ground Rules:

Meeting ground rules that are established by the meeting team help the team move forward in their thinking and work especially when they get to the place when difficult issues are to be discussed or decisions made.

- ✚ Be present and ready to begin on time. (Arrive early to start on time.) No side conversations.
- ✚ Cut off lengthy discussions and assign offline actions as necessary.
- ✚ Assign a leader, facilitator, recorder, and time keeper at the beginning of each meeting. Have and follow an agenda - add times for each agenda item.
- ✚ If you oppose, you must propose.
- ✚ Assign action items only to people present at the meeting. Choose action item due dates with 80% confidence.
- ✚ Strive for 100% on time, but provide advance warning if an action item will not be completed on time. Use process check, *“Is this what we want to be discussing right now: Should the subject be taken offline from here?”*
- ✚ If things get heated, focus on the situation or issue, not the person. Respect for each other no matter how contentious the topic.

## HOW TO OPEN A MEETING

### Welcome

Once everyone has arrived, the chairperson, or whoever is in charge of the meeting should formally welcome everyone to the meeting and thank the attendees for coming.

- Well, since everyone is here, we should get started.
- Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming today.
- I think we'll begin now. First I'd like to welcome you all.
- Thank you all for coming at such short notice.
- I really appreciate you all for attending today.
- We have a lot to cover today, so we really should begin.

### Sample Welcome:

**Pierre:** I think we'll begin now. First I'd like to welcome you all and thank everyone for coming, especially at such short notice. I know you are all very busy and it's difficult to take time away from your daily tasks for meetings.

## Introductions

If anyone at the meeting is new to the group, or if there is a guest speaker, this is the time when introductions should be made. The person in charge of the meeting can introduce the new person, or ask the person to introduce him or herself.

- I'd like to take a moment to introduce our new tour coordinator.
- I know most of you, but there are a few unfamiliar faces.
- Stella, would you like to stand up and introduce yourself?

## Roll Call/Apologies

If the meeting is a small group, it is probably unnecessary to take attendance out loud. The person who is taking the minutes will know everyone personally and can indicate who is present and who is absent. In a larger meeting, it may be necessary to send around an attendance sheet or call out names. If an important figure is absent, it may be necessary for the chairperson to apologize for his or her absence and offer a brief explanation for it.

- It looks like everyone is here today.
- If you notice anyone missing, please let Jane know so that she can make a note of it.
- Unfortunately, Ken cannot join us today. He has been called away on business
- Mike will be standing in to take the minutes today, as Lisa is home with the flu.

## Objectives

Some people who hold meetings prefer to pass around copies of the agenda, and others will use their presentation. No matter which format is used, attendees should be able to follow the agenda as the meeting progresses. Before beginning the first main item on the agenda, the speaker should provide a brief verbal outline the objectives.

## Sample Introduction to the Agenda:

**Pierre:** As you can all see here on the agenda we will be mainly talking about the upcoming tourist season. First we'll discuss the groups that will be coming in from Japan. After that we'll discuss the North American Tours, followed by the Korean tours. If time allows we will also discuss the Australian tours which are booked for early September. Next, I'm going to request some feedback from all of you concerning last year's tours and where you think we can improve. And finally, we'll be voting on where and when to have this year's staff picnic.

## MEETING MINUTES

### What Are Meeting Minutes?

Meeting minutes can be defined as the written record of everything that's happened during a meeting. They're used to inform people who didn't attend the meeting about what happened, or to keep track of what was decided during the meeting so that you can revisit it and use it to inform future decisions.

### What Should Be Included in Meeting Minutes?

Before you start taking notes, it's important to understand the type of information you need to record at the meeting. As noted earlier, your organization may have required content and a specific format that you'll need to follow, but generally, meeting minutes usually include the following:

- Date and time of the meeting
- Names of the meeting participants and those unable to attend (e.g., "regrets")
- Acceptance or corrections/amendments to previous meeting minutes
- Decisions made about each agenda item, for example:
  - Actions taken or agreed to be taken
  - Next steps
  - Voting outcomes – e.g., (if necessary, details regarding who made motions; who seconded and approved or via show of hands, etc.)
  - Motions taken or rejected
  - Items to be held over
  - New business
  - Next meeting date and time

### Tips that might help your note taking:

- **Create an outline** – as discussed earlier, having an outline (or template) based on the agenda makes it easy for you to simply jot down notes, decisions, etc. under each item as you go along. If you are taking notes by hand, consider including space below each item on your outline for your handwritten notes, then print these out and use this to capture minutes.
- **Check-off attendees as they enter the room** – if you know the meeting attendees, you can check them off as they arrive, if not have folks introduce themselves at the start of the meeting or circulate an attendance list they can check-off themselves.
- **Record decisions or notes on action items** in your outline as soon as they occur to be sure they are recorded accurately
- **Ask for clarification if necessary** – for example, if the group moves on without making a decision or an obvious conclusion, ask for clarification of the decision and/or next steps involved.
- **Don't try to capture it all** – you can't keep up if you try to write down the conversation verbatim, so be sure to simply (and clearly) write (or type) just the decisions, assignments, action steps, etc
- **Record it** – literally, if you are concerned about being able to keep up with note taking, consider recording the meeting (e.g., on your smart phone, iPad, recording device, etc.) but be sure to let

participants know they are being recording. While you don't want to use the recording to create a word-for-word transcript of the meeting, the recording can come in handy if you need clarification.

## Meeting Minutes Vocabulary

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Useful phrases for formal minutes

PASSIVE VOICE	ACTIVE VOICE
<b>Phrases for informing / discussing etc.</b>	
The new Board members were welcomed by the Chair.	The Chair welcomed the Committee members and noted apologies from X.
The Board was informed that	The Chair informed the Board that
Issues outlined / highlighted by X included:	X outlined / highlighted the following:
The report "title here" was presented by X, who explained that	X introduced the report "title here" to the meeting and explained that
Consideration was given to	The Board discussed / considered Z
The Board was provided with details of Z	The Board discussed this matter in detail
Questions raised included:	The Board also considered the following questions:
Points made in favour/against of the proposal included:	The Board is satisfied that
Z was discussed in detail / briefly	The CEO informed the Committee that
The following comments were made:	The Committee made the following comments:
Following a summary of the report "title here", the following issues were highlighted:	X gave a short summary of the report "title here" and highlighted the following issues:
<b>Phrases for decisions / actions</b>	
It was proposed to / agreed to:	The Board nominated X
This recommendation was proposed by X and seconded by Y.	Following a discussion, the Board agreed it would do Z / make plans for Z / go ahead with Z /
It was agreed that X would	The Board agreed / confirmed / decided
It was agreed to establish / request Z	The Board requested that
Actions agreed:	Following an evaluation, the Committee decided to
Decisions / Recommendations:	The Committee will recommend Z

**Some useful verbs**

agreed	approved	analysed	chose
clarified	concerned	concluded	confirmed
considered	debated	decided	defined
deliberated	demonstrated	determined	disagreed
discussed	disputed	drew attention to	emphasised
established	examined	explained	illustrated
informed	intended	meant	named
picked	planned	pointed out	preferred
proposed	raised	recalled	reminded
reported	said	selected	stated
suggested	understood	verified	worried

**Some useful nouns**

agreement	alternatives
advantages	benefits
dangers	decisions
disagreement	disadvantages
dispute	drawbacks
existence of	issue
merits	opportunity
potential	probability
problem	prospect
resolution	solution

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## HOW TO DISAGREE POLITELY

The most polite way to disagree with someone is to use one of these strategies when introducing your disagreement:

- show that you understand the other person's opinion
- apologize before introducing your disagreement
- pretend to be in the middle or unsure about your position

**Using these strategies helps to soften the disagreement and make your position or argument more effective.**

- I see what you're saying but I think...
- I respect your point but from my perspective (or but in my opinion)...
- I take your point but that isn't the way I see it; instead, I think that...
- True, that is a fair point, but I have to say I disagree...
- I understand where you are coming from but...
- There is some truth to what you're saying but don't you think that...
- I'm sorry but I have to disagree with you on...
- I'm not sure I agree with you on...
- I don't think you and I have the same opinion on this issue.
- I'm afraid I disagree.
- I'm sorry but I don't agree.
- I don't see it that way.
- I'm sorry but I disagree with you on this.
- I respectfully disagree.
- I have a completely different opinion on that.

### **In a Polite Disagreement, Always Offer an Alternative Solution**

To effectively argue for your position or opinion, it is best to finish your disagreement by offering an alternative or a suggestion. This is a solution-focused argument and can also soften the disagreement. Here are some great expressions to use after expressing your disagreement:

- Instead, I think we should/could...
- My suggestion would be to...



- An alternative solution might be...
- I would recommend that we...
- How about we...
- What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_ instead?
- If you ask me, I think we should...

## 11 WAYS TO INTERRUPT SOMEONE POLITELY IN ENGLISH

### When you need to deliver a message:

- I hate to interrupt but I wanted to let you know I have to leave the meeting early.
- I'm so sorry to interrupt but...
- I don't mean to be rude but may I interrupt quickly?

### When you need to end a conversation

- I'm terribly sorry to interrupt you but I have to be at work for a meeting shortly and must \*get going\*. It was wonderful to see you. Have a nice day. (Note: In this context, to get going means to depart or leave.)
- Oh! Sorry to interrupt but I just noticed the time and I need to get to work. I'm very sorry. But it was great chatting with you.

### When you need to ask a question or would like to clarify something:

- Sorry to interrupt but may I ask a quick question?
- I'm so sorry for interrupting but I'd like to make sure I understood you correctly.
- I don't mean to be rude but I'd like to ask a question.

### When you want to join a conversation or express your opinion:

- So sorry to interrupt but before we \*move on\*, I'd like to add my thoughts on this topic. (Note: to move on means to start doing or discussing something new.)
- Excuse me but may I jump in here?
- May I add something quickly?



## HOW TO END A MEETING

To help everyone retain what they've learned and leave the meeting remembering what was discussed, you can signal that the meeting's coming to a close by saying:

- To summarize, we've discussed...
- I'm going to briefly cover the topics we've reviewed today.
- Before we finish, let's recap our main points.
- In a nutshell, we've spoken about...
- Here are the three main takeaways from our meeting...

While employees sometimes wish their meetings were shorter, there are certain situations where topics may become prolonged. In these cases, you can use some of this professional vocabulary to temporarily pause the issue until it can be resolved another time:

- I'd love to continue this conversation at our next meeting...
- As much as I'd like to keep this discussion going, I want to respect everyone's time...
- We've done some great brainstorming for today; let's give our minds a rest and tackle the issue again during our next meeting.
- I know we're all busy people, so let's pause there for now.

Finally, to fully end a meeting, you can keep it simple, thanking everyone for their time and leaving the door open for further communication if necessary. Here are a few phrases to help you definitively finish a meeting:

- If there's nothing more to discuss, I think we can wrap it up here.
- That seems to cover everything for today.
- Since we're finished our agenda items, everyone is free to go.
- Thank you for being so productive!
- Thanks to everyone who was able to join today.

## Following up

It may be that you need to send a follow-up communication after the meeting. It's also possible that the meeting you held was large or significant enough to merit a debriefing. In either case, you can use the following phrases to reach out to attendees post-meeting:

- Thanks again to everyone who attended. I just wanted to follow up with...
- Thanks for the great meeting today! Before the next meeting, it's great if we could...
- Given that we were able to accomplish all of our agenda items today, our next meeting's agenda will cover...
- I so appreciate you sharing your thoughts and ideas during our last meeting! If you wouldn't mind sharing your experience...