

# EFFECTIVE MEETING PLANNING TIPS

Here are 12 time- and money-saving tips on how to plan an effective meeting.

1. Always outline the meeting objective.
  - a. Things get done and time is saved because people know what to expect.
  - b. Participants feel energized and valued because there is focus.
  - c. Attendees will contribute freely, find solutions, and make decision.
  - d. Give people the right to challenge their attendance at a meeting especially if it does not sync with their job, projects, or directions.
  - e. If you are not in charge of the meeting (this is what Stars do):
    - i. Review the agenda. If there is nothing that is pertinent to your job and projects, question your attendance as the best use of your time.
    - ii. Be prepared to ask questions. Link them back to objectives, mission, vision, or other important company directives. Or better yet, include your knowledge from another project that can be applied to this one.
    - iii. Volunteer when appropriate and don't just sit there like a lump. Show your initiative. Don't wait to get recognized.
2. When people are determined to bring their hidden agendas, you must be firm in sticking to the meeting agenda. Establish a "parking lot" so their issues are written down and can possibly be discussed during the meeting, at a later meeting, or off-line and out of meeting time.
3. Control time-wasters, know-it-alls, and bores with ground rules (see #7).
4. When people show up late, preassign a point person to bring latecomers up-to-date when they finally arrive. This helps prevent wasting other people's time. Or better yet, set a fine for late arrivals. (When I worked for Westinghouse Financial Project in Atlanta, the fine was \$100—the money was given to charities!)
5. If you are not in charge of the meeting:
  - a. If no one else is calling attention to the above ideas, take the initiative and bring it up.
  - b. If you are saying to yourself, "I'll be fired"—hear me saying to you, "No you won't. It's what people do who take personal responsibility for their time and success."
6. Distribute the agenda 24 hours before the meeting. This allows the thinkers and process-oriented people time to assimilate the agenda and consider their questions. This does not mean they can add to or change the agenda. If additional ideas are requested, they go on the agenda for the next meeting.



7. Set ground rules.
  - a. Ask the group if they would like to spend less time in meetings. (If you don't get a response, quit. These people are too inept to work with.)
  - b. On a flip chart, ask them about the rules they would like to establish to run the meeting. These rules should be set by the attendees and revised for each meeting. If anyone veers off track, anyone can ask the group if they still choose to adhere to the ground rules.
    - i. Meeting ground rules:
      1. Stick to the agenda.
      2. Begin and end on time.
      3. Do not repeat an issue already reviewed.
      4. Provide concise answers (no rambling).
      5. Let each attendee finish their thought.
      6. Do not interrupt.
      7. What is said here stays here.
      8. Keep an open mind. Don't judge.
8. Ask for Q&A before the meeting closes with action items. You want people to walk away with what they need to do instead of the answer to the last question.
  - a. Give participants note pads to record their questions.
  - b. Create a parking lot to be used for items that arise that are not on the agenda. These items will be put on another meeting agenda.
9. Set time limits.
  - a. Limit comments to two sentences.
  - b. Appoint a timer so no comment runs over a predetermined amount of time. Suggestion: Hold each comment to less than two minutes.
  - c. Stick to the ground rule to begin and end on time!
10. Consider disrupting the meeting configuration and arrangement.
  - a. Have a stand-up meeting (they take less time).
  - b. Change the venue (park, restaurant, different conference room).
  - c. Vary the facilitator (draw numbers so everyone has to lead a meeting).
  - d. Do the same with meeting minutes, planning, follow-up, and so on.
  - e. Critical! Ask yourself if the meeting could be an e-mail instead.
11. Meeting minutes.
  - a. Record the meeting and send a downloadable file.
  - b. Have each section of the meeting documented by a different person.
  - c. Video tape the meeting (if you try this, people will be constrained at first).
12. Meeting planning.

Start planning your meeting agenda by determining what you want the group to do, think, or understand. Ask yourself, "What do I want them to walk away with? What action do I want them to take?" This is the same format discussed above in presentation skills. Use the same template to plan your meeting.

