

Meetings: how to turn a cost into an asset

Alan Manly | September 17, 2019



Meetings often become a work based social function on company time and at company cost. The thought of socialising with fellow staff and being paid at the same time is sure to keep meetings a popular distraction to lonely work routines. Many companies have a tendency to gravitate toward their objectives by the sheer momentum of the organisation, with or without the meetings. To assess the quality of a meeting go no further than the official minutes. Agenda items are loosely worded. Action items are carried over from one meeting to the next. The most obvious element missing in such meetings is leadership. So, how can you turn meetings from a cost into a company asset?

Set the Agenda

Meetings need a reason. That's why issues to be discussed are listed as items on the agenda. If you are running a meeting, put all the issues that you want discussed on the agenda. Don't be afraid to itemise every issue that you want discussed. It will give you and others in the meeting a firm guideline of what is expected to be discussed. You will also sleep better if all the news, good and bad, is aired in the meeting. Others of course may sleep less when they see the agenda. Finally, stick to the agenda. Exercise leadership. Suppress your random good ideas. Being smart and quick witted may work against you in your meeting. Boring is good!

Know who is where

Sign an attendance sheet. This sets the scene that the meeting is serious. Apologies need to be recorded along with late arrivals. If anyone excuses themselves from the meeting for any reason the minutes should record the time of leaving and returning. The minutes should show who was in the room at the time that each agenda item was discussed.

Timing is everything

Start the meeting on time. It's not the five or ten minutes that you are focusing on. It's the leadership issue. Either you are leading or following. Start on time and let the others learn that they will fall behind if they are late. Then move in for total control of the meeting. Items on the agenda must be given serious consideration and be shown to have been considered. Each item on the agenda should be run as a separate meeting. The time at the commencement of each agenda item should be noted in the minutes. Time spent discussing each agenda item indicates what the collective thoughts about the seriousness of that item. Fast or slow let the meeting minutes record.

Know the agenda

Have each agenda item assigned to a meeting member who is able to speak to the issue. Insist that each speaker has a brief paper of what they are going to talk about. Bullet points will do. This not only assists the speaker to stay on message. It does everyone a favour including the secretary who will have a skeleton to build the meeting discussion on.

Review the last meetings minutes

This is a serious risk management issue. Once the minutes are accepted it is what you agreed to. Make sure you understand what was the intent of the agenda item, key points of discussion and what was finally decided upon to. You may have read in the media of company directors in court reflecting unsuccessfully on what was discussed in a meeting five years ago. The better the minutes, the better your memory. Have minutes that really make sense to a stranger or a regulator or the tax man or heaven forbid, a judge!

Manage the current meeting minutes

After each item is discussed ask for what has been recording in the minutes. Make sure the secretary has got it right. This ensures that the minutes accurately reflect what was agreed and everyone is still in the room. Accepting the minutes in the next meeting will be lot easier if this work is done as it happens and not relying on faint memory of a month or more.

By following these guidelines you will achieve desired outcomes which ensure that your meetings will not be a memory test or an office bun fight. The leadership shown in the minutes will repay the investment many times over.

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Alan Manly is the founder and CEO of Group Colleges Australia, one of Australia's largest private education institutions and recently launched the private MBA school, the Universal Business School Sydney. From a high school dropout to successful entrepreneur, Alan is a true disrupter in the private education space. He the author of two books, *The Unlikely Entrepreneur* and *When There Are Too Many Lawyers There Is No Justice*. To find out more about Alan visit www.alanmanly.com.au.

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