

## **Are Your Meetings Necessary or Are Meetings Your Nemesis? (1,001 words)**

We attend so many meetings, often going from one meeting to another to another, hardly getting a chance to get anything done. Do we have to have so many meetings? It is estimated that there are over 11 million meetings held in the United States every single day, and not all of them at your organization. Some of those meetings are for results and some of those meetings are just out of habit. Before you call a meeting, determine whether a meeting is necessary, be clear about the reason for the meeting, review exactly whose attendance is required, and clearly announce decisions made and actions expected.

**Necessary or Not:** There are some advantages to having meetings. Having meetings will allow for discussion, sharing of conflictive opinions and suggestions on how to solve problems. Having meetings is much more personal than email or text messaging and can enhance team building and cohesiveness. Having meetings also allows for two-way communication with the benefit of immediate feedback and the richness of nonverbal communication.

Having meetings allows the person who called, or is running the meeting, to find out immediately whether the message is understood and how it is being interpreted and received. And finally, all listeners receive the same information at the same time without delay or any other organizational factors having any distracting impact.

Have meetings for results. Don't just have meetings out of habit. Don't forget, meetings are expensive, the direct costs of the payroll of people attending, and the indirect costs of decisions and actions not being taken while people are sitting in meetings. It's okay to have meetings, just make sure it is worth it.

**Good Reasons for Meeting:** You can call a meeting for one or more of the following reasons. You can call a meeting to share information. Give out information that needs clarification and discussion, or to present an explanation from a particular expert. Progress reports and project reviews help people come to a common understanding or a collective judgment.

You can call a meeting to receive and give advice. Often it is easier to give advice than receive it. The purpose of this type of meeting is to create something new: a policy, a strategy, a target, a plan, or a procedure. Come ready for the contribution of ideas, opinions, experience, knowledge and judgment. You can call a meeting to discover and solve problems and make decisions.

You can simple have a meeting to define the team or re-define the team and build and maintain morale. Working together is a social event and meetings like these provide everyone a chance to reconnect and enjoy the sense of a collective identity. You can meet to sell ideas and seek change in the organization. And finally, you can call a meeting to train people. For instance, you could hire me to come into your organization and train people by providing seminars on professional development topics.

Make sure you know why you are calling the meeting. Nothing drains morale more quickly than attending a meeting that seems to have no purpose. Here's an idea, call a meeting when you really need a meeting.

**Attendance Required:** Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether your attendance is essential or optional. A thorough meeting notice would help. It would be great to receive a meeting notice that has the details for the meeting. A good meeting notice would include details like the date of the notice, the date of the meeting, the start time, the end time, the meeting location, who called the meeting, and the phone number or email address of the person calling the meeting.

Ideally, we would expect to receive a list of meeting objectives. Insist on an agenda that lists the topics and the activities related to the topics: information giving, brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making, team-building, the activity leader, and the time expected for each item.

There should also be guidelines concerning preparation required of participants for the meeting, including information or materials participants should bring to the meeting, along with audiovisual needs. It would be great to list the names of people whose attendance at this meeting is essential and also a list of people whose attendance is optional, but who should at least be informed that the meeting is taking place. Great meeting notices guarantee great meeting results. Take a few minutes and improve your meeting notices and provide details of the upcoming meeting to make sure it is a good use of all the participants' time.

**Results from Meeting:** It is everyone's responsibility to jot down notes during the meeting to make sure they don't miss important information or future tasks or activities for which they are accountable. There should be a meeting summary and action plan distributed immediately after the meeting. I call these instant minutes.

Whoever is the person assigned to keep minutes, to be the note-taker, or secretary, can create a summary report with action plans. This format will provide a structure for easy note-taking and follow-up procedures. The meeting summary should highlight the meeting subject, who called the meeting, the meeting date, the start time, the end time, the person responsible for the minutes, and their contact information. There should be a list of the participants to send minutes to, and a list of others who need to be informed and receive a copy. There should be a list of key points of discussion along with the outcomes and accomplishments.

There should also be a list of actions to be taken, the people responsible for those tasks, and when the tasks need to be completed or progress reported, and the date and time of the next meeting with preliminary agenda items. Having a meeting should be just the start of making things happen. Clear and concise minutes provide participants guidance for effective execution of ideas and decisions.

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