10 Guidelines for Effective Meetings

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Running effective meetings can sometimes be challenging - even for the most experienced leaders. Participants have conflicting priorities, some have different expectations and *everyone* is busy. And lately, it seems iPhones and Android have added a new level of distraction for meeting attendees.

Short of banning Smart Phones from meetings (*now there's a concept*!), consistently following a few guidelines will help make your meetings more effective. Use this information for planning and running your next meeting(s).

TEN GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

1. **Select the Best Leader**
   Excellent leadership is the key element to an effective meeting. The meeting's leader sets the tone, makes sure the agenda items are covered, encourages respect of all participants and their ideas, and guides the overall process.

> **Quick Tip:** Consider revolving leadership. It reduces the burden on one person (you) and is a great development opportunity for others to hone their own skills in meeting management.

2. **Establish the Meeting's Purpose**
   Ask yourself and your team, "*What do we want to accomplish in this meeting?*" Be clear about its purpose. Is it to share information? Will this be a networking meeting? If so, how will you encourage networking? Will there be a number of speakers? Will decisions be made during the meeting and do you need people to prepare ahead of time? This next question is the most obvious one, yet is often not asked. Is a meeting really necessary? Don't get into the habit of having meetings just because you've always had meetings. For example, if you have a recurring meeting, it is okay to cancel if there is nothing new to discuss? There may be more efficient ways to accomplish what you need to do. Finally, occasionally ask everyone, "Is this a good use of our time? Is it valuable for everyone to continue with these meetings?"

> **Quick Tip:** If the meeting finishes early, let everyone leave. Too often I've found leaders who will let meetings drag on until the very last scheduled minute is used. These last few minutes are filled with small talk and are a waste of time.

3. **Create an Agenda**
   For every meeting that's scheduled, create an agenda, including the purpose, to help people know what to expect and to frame the information in their minds in advance. Refer again to guideline #2: Is your meeting for their information or do you expect decisions to be made? If it's for a decision, then state the expectation upfront so people can prepare ahead of time.

> **Quick Tip:** Ask for input on the agenda a few days before the meeting. This allows people who need time to process to give you their input. Be sure to allocate the amount of time required for each item.
>
> At the beginning of your meeting ask if there are any additions, deletions or changes.

4. **Invite the Right Participants**
   If you do expect to make a decision at the meeting, then make sure to invite the decision makers needed. The converse is equally as important: don't invite people who don't need to be there. They'll appreciate you respecting their time.

> **Quick Tip:** If possible, don't mix information-meetings and decision-meetings. You can delve into the details for the decision-meetings without boring the people who don't need to be there.

5. **Select the Best Time of Day**
   You may not have too many options when scheduling a meeting. Try to stay away from the times right after lunch (people may be in a food-lull) or late in the day (they're thinking about going home).

> **Quick Tip:** If some people are teleconferencing in to the meeting, remember to take into consideration the time zone where they live. You'll lose favor if they have to get up in the middle of the night to attend the meeting.

6. **Start and End on Time**
   A clear sign of respect is to start and end meetings on time. And, as the leader, be sure you are there five minutes early for set up. When it's time for the meeting to start don't wait for the stragglers to arrive. If you can't cover all agenda items and need to schedule another meeting, determine if any items (the FYI items, not the decisions) can be accomplished by e-mail instead.

> **Quick Tip:** When working with teams who are consistently late starting their meetings, I recommend they fine the late-comers. It doesn't have to be a large fine. A dollar or two makes a difference for accountability. One team decided they wanted the fine to have a real impact and they implemented a fine of *$5 per minute.* As you can imagine, it didn't take long before everyone showed up on time. What did they do with the money accumulated? It was used for a pizza lunch later in the year.

7. **Stay on Track with a Timekeeper**
   It's easy to stray from your agenda. This isn't necessarily bad because you'll hear some great ideas. Don't let those ideas take over, though; keep track of them and follow-up after the meeting. If a discussion threatens to consume the whole meeting then table that discussion. You can assign a group of people to work on it and report back. On the other hand, you may decide to let the discussion run its course and to continue the other agenda items another time.

> **Quick Tip:** An easy solution to track time is to ask someone to volunteer to be the timekeeper. Here's the caution though: be sure the person is time-focused and will pay attention to the time. Another creative solution is to use an egg timer and set it for each agenda item.

8. **Check for Process and the Level of Contribution**
   Take time for process and time checks to stay on track and to keep the meeting moving forward. Plus, be sure that everyone contributes and is heard.

> **Quick Tip:** Ask questions of the quiet meeting attendees. Then, wait and let them talk.

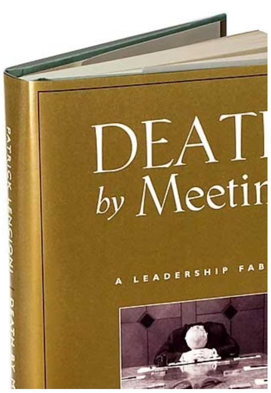
9. **Be Clear on Actions and Deadlines**
Do you need people to complete certain tasks either before or after the meeting? Then have clear agreements on what you expect and due dates. Otherwise, all that's taken place is a conversation.

> **Quick Tip:** At the end of the meeting, spend five minutes to summarize. This helps to insure clear understanding of discussions and decisions, to clarify as necessary, and reinforce assignments / future TO-DOs.

10. **Follow Up**
Your meeting will be even more effective if notes are distributed for everyone's reference. Are there items that people need to report on before the next meeting? If so, make follow-up after the meeting a priority.

> **Quick Tip:** Schedule a 10 minute break between meetings to jot down your notes for follow-up. If you rush from one meeting to the next, you will likely forget the important points.

Recommended Reading:



Death by Meeting: A Leadership Fable...About Solving the Most Painful Problem in Business

by Patrick M. Lencioni
March 2004

Lencioni is also the author of the best-selling books, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and *The Five Temptations of a CEO*

About Sylva (Syl) Leduc

Syl Leduc is a leadership development strategist, executive coach, writer, presenter and self-proclaimed techno-geek. She is equally at home on stage talking to a thousand people, coaching the CEO of a company, or helping a budding entrepreneur launch a new business. She's an 'Architect of Ideas' who helps people think in different ways and see beyond the obvious.

For the past 20 years she has worked with thousands of people around the world, through one-on-one executive coaching, thought-provoking leadership development programs, fast-paced teleforums and as the founder of a software company.

The software company, called ***Client Compass™***, produces the leading coaching software used by more than 3,000 coaches around the world to track their clients' information, goals and successes. In 2005, her software company was acquired by John Wiley & Sons, the international publishing house.

The Leadership Center is her coaching/consulting company. She launched TLC after a successful career as an executive with an international career transition firm and as a leadership development coach on the Change Management team at Ernst & Young, LLP, a Management Consulting Firm. When the life of the "Road Warrior" lost its glamour, she launched her own coaching/consulting company.

As a recognized expert in career & leadership development, coaching technology and small business management, Syl wrote the careers column for a Northwest magazine, published a book on career decisions titled, "*Women's Work: Choice, Chance, or Socialization*," and was the editor/writer for a monthly Technology Tips newsletter. She was the Senior Editor for 24/7 Coaching's Corporate Newsletter called, ***News You Can Use 24/7.***

With two degrees from the University of Calgary: a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology with a specialization in Career Development and a BA in psychology, she is a life long learner. She is on the faculty of the **College of Executive Coaching** where she received the MPEC (Master Personal and Executive Coach) designation. She's an award winning executive coach with the **Ken Blanchard Companies** and the International Coach Federation where she and her company have been recognized twice by the International Coach Federation. In 2007, Sylva and one of her clients, Child Care Resources, received the PRISM Award from the International Coach Federation (NW Chapter) for the implementation of coaching as a leadership strategy. And in 2012, Sylva and her client, LeadingArizona, also received the Prism Award for the Leading Age Leadership Academy. The Leadership Academy began in 2010 and ran for six years. Read about the remarkable successes that these organizations achieved and this prestigious award at www.SageLeaders.com/prism