THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

SUCCESSFUL TEAM MEETINGS

☑ SAVE TIME

☑ ENGAGE YOUR TEAM

☑ ACCOMPLISH MORE

INCLUDES FREE CHECKLISTS

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10 SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT MEETINGS

1 Poorly organized meetings cost the U.S. economy $399 BILLION in 2019.

2 55 million meetings are held per week.

3 15% of an organization's average time is spent in meetings. Middle managers spend 35% of their time in meetings. Upper management spends 50% of their time in meetings.

4 Employees spend 4 hours per week preparing for status update meetings.

5 67% of employees complain that spending too much time in meetings hinders them from being productive at work.

6 35% of employees waste 2-5 hours per day on meetings and calls, but have nothing to show.

7 92% of employees find themselves multitasking during meetings

8 95% of attendees lose focus and miss parts while 39% doze off at meetings

9 76% of professionals prefer face to face communication during meetings rather than calls or video conferencing.

10 95% of professionals deem meeting in person more effective in fostering relationships at work.

HOW MUCH ARE BAD MEETINGS COSTING YOU?

4 TYPES OF MEETINGS YOU SHOULD KEEP

Every effective meeting begins with a clear goal.

If you want to have an effective team meeting, you need to know exactly what you're going to cover during the meeting and what you want to get out of it when it wraps.

Ideally, meeting outcomes should be tangible and measurable; so, for example, if a meeting's agenda is to brainstorm possible ideas for a new product launch, the outcomes could be:

- A list of the top 10 potential product ideas;
- A list of research assignments for each of those product ideas (and who on the team is responsible for each); and
- Deadlines for when the research assignments are due

There are really only 4 reasons to meet...

MAKE MEETINGS WORK

1. Brainstorm & Solve Problems

This is an opportunity for individuals with different values, ideas, and experiences to share their perspectives. Brainstorming and solving problems go hand-in-hand. You rarely solve a problem without brainstorming, and vice versa.

- The key to brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible––quantity over quality. Don't judge too quickly (or at all) during this meeting, otherwise you may miss out on a truly novel idea.

2. Create a Plan & Make Decisions

A planning and decision-making meeting provides direction for the organization or team. The subject of such a meeting may range from strategy formulation to tactical problem-solving.

- The goal is to gather a group of people who already have enough background information and authority to decide the way forward.

3. Build, Strengthen, or Align Your Team

A team-building meeting develops collective capabilities, especially interpersonal and organizational skills. Such a meeting may also help instill a sense of togetherness and a commitment to collective performance.

4. Look Back & Improve

Individuals on your team are guaranteed to have different perspectives and experiences of the same event, and you'll miss out on a lot of those valuable insights if you ask everyone to just add their thoughts to an email thread. The goal of any retrospective meeting is to create a shared mental model of what actually happened and to figure out the plan of action moving forward. Choose areas you want to improve and identify the tasks that'll get you there.

- Find a way to capture what you learned and share it with other teams inside your company. This will help others avoid the mistakes that you made. Don't miss our framework for retrospective meetings at the end of this ebook.

BETTER MEETINGS RESULT IN

TIME SAVED

STRONG TEAMS

MORE ACHIEVED

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8 STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Virtual meetings have their pros and their cons. They are flexible and easy, but the internet lags, there's audio feedback, and someone's spouse, children, or pets will undoubtedly make a cameo. Since these challenges are inevitable, we're providing 8 tips for making your virtual meetings efficient and engaging:

1. Set an Agenda

Failure to plan is planning to fail. Before you meet, send an agenda:

- Purpose for meeting
- Roundtable Updates
- Discussion Topics
- Action Items
- Meeting Structure (e.g., when and for how long you plan to discuss each talking point)
- What each team member/team is responsible for bringing to the meeting
- Any relevant documents, files, or research

> ❝
> **FAILURE TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL** ❞

2. Establish Clear Guidelines

Just as important as the meeting agenda are the rules and expectations of how the team is expected to contribute to the virtual meeting. Make sure that everyone enters into the meeting with clear guidelines of expectations and knowing what everyone is going to be doing and how to manage the virtual space.

For example, can everyone speak freely or will the team leader call on someone when it's that person's turn to contribute? Does everyone need to have their camera on at all times or just the presenter? Should people mute their phones while others are speaking? Setting clear guidelines (and sending them to the team at least 24 hours in advance) will help ensure that everyone is on the same page before the virtual meeting takes place. Here are some guidelines to consider:

- Introduce everyone during the meeting, and give everyone a chance to contribute
- Don't stare at your phone while other people are presenting
- Don't interrupt other people when they're speaking (or attempt to speak over them)
- Test all technology (including camera/video, Wi-Fi, and screen sharing) before the meeting
- Read the agenda, and come prepared
- Don't work on other tasks (like checking email) during the virtual meeting
- Turn off all notifications and make sure your cell phone is on silent
- Make sure all team members are in a quiet area free from unnecessary distractions
- When in doubt, just practice common courtesy. People want to be heard, seen, and respected during an online meeting—just like they do everywhere else.

3. Ditch the PowerPoint

Identify the minimum number of slides you need in order to communicate your purpose effectively. Reading through slides creates a stagnant atmosphere and your message will get lost. Instead, try getting your point across by using stories or visuals to engage your audience. Storytelling improves listening skills that are essential in learning and building relationships, and provides entertainment.

- If you are going to use slides, limit your slides to 6 words per slide. This keeps your audience focused on you, the presenter.

4. Keep It Concise

Clear and concise meetings give team members the opportunity to feel connected without interrupting too much of their daily momentum. Make sure your meeting agenda is really straightforward and stick to it; including a firm start and end time to help maintain the level of focus.

- Dr. Rogelberg of UNC Charlotte highlights that meetings tend to obey Parkinson's Law – they expand to the time you give them. If you allocate two hours for a meeting, you better believe that it's going to take up the whole two hours. The illusion of having ample time allows inefficiencies to set in naturally – people tend to explain themselves more, it becomes okay to come in a few minutes later or to start setting up after the meeting has begun. Give some thought ahead of time to how much time the discussion really needs to take place and allocate just enough time to cover that. Provide enough information so everyone comes in prepared.

5. Remind Them of the Goal

Within the first minute of your meeting, help your attendees understand the problem you're gathered to solve. There's a good chance they didn't read your agenda, so go over it and ask if you missed anything.

6. Keep It Interactive

Assign participants active roles to keep them engaged in the meeting. In addition to validating their voices, roles can help everyone stay on task and avoid the urge to cave in to distractions.

- Consider round-robin style of conversations where everyone gets 5 minutes to talk, but call on the least vocal person first. Those who speak the least are likely to have different perspectives than others, but they need to be drawn out and made first in line, otherwise you risk their perspective being lost within the more vocal team members.

7. Assign & Delegate

Close the meeting by identifying and assigning clear action items. Don't forget to designate the appropriate points of contact and establish due dates. Not having a clear purpose for each attendee is the quickest way to kill team engagement. Before the meeting, make sure everyone on the team has a job; for example, have one team member write down any questions that come up during a brainstorm, have another take notes on key discussion points, and have another manage the slide progression during the presentation.

8. Create a Virtual Water Cooler

Informal conversations and connections help build a rapport that carries over into meetings, making people feel more engaged and perhaps more comfortable voicing their opinions or offering critical feedback.

Get everyone comfortable with communicating with each other by building a "virtual water cooler" — a communal place online where team members can get to know each other and connect outside of structured meetings. Giving distributed teams a shared space to connect.

VIRTUAL MEETING CHECKLIST

DATE OF MEETING

GOAL

AGENDA

- ○ SEND AGENDA 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE

- ○ ESTABLISH CLEAR GUIDELINES

- ○ DITCH THE POWERPOINT

OTHER TASKS

- ○
- ○
- ○

- ○ KEEP IT CONCISE (PARKINSON'S LAW)

MEETING NOTES

- ○ REMIND THEM OF THE GOAL AT START

- ○ KEEP IT INTERACTIVE

ASSIGNMENTS

- ○ ASSIGN & DELEGATE

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ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE; TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH.

– HELEN KELLER

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10 TIPS FOR FACILITATING SUCCESSFUL IN-PERSON MEETINGS

In-person meetings may be few and far between due to COVID but more teams are beginning to meet again. At Spark, we're proud of our world-class facilitators and exceptional corporate retreats.

Over the years we've hosted and facilitated thousands of successful meetings. Below, we've captured some of our best tips for creating a safe and effective environment for your next in-person retreat.

1. Select a Space for Your Needs

Pick a space with comfortable furniture that can be easily configured to generate energy and encourage group discussion with enough room to spread out and maintain social distancing.

- If the goal of your meeting is collaboration, consider round tables or circular groups to encourage feedback and discussion.

> IT TAKES TWO FLINTS TO MAKE A FIRE

2. Provide Food

This one is often overlooked but it goes a long way. Provide individually packaged food, beverages and snacks so guests are well-fueled and comfortable. Lighter meals will help combat afternoon drowsiness.

Spend a little extra on your food if possible. The quality of your food and snacks has an exponential effect on the quality of your meeting. If your food is low in quality, your guests will be upset, they'll talk about it, and the undercooked biscuits will quickly hijack the purpose of your meeting. If the food is great, they'll be happy and engaged.

3. Treat All the Senses

You're providing tasty food and drinks, right? Great! How might you treat the other senses? Music can be a great way to prepare your guests before you say a word.

Are you inviting your guests to interact during your meeting? Do you want the energy to be high or low when they enter? These are questions to ask yourself when selecting music. If you want the energy to be high, select music that is 120 beats per minute. If you'd rather the energy to be thoughtful and calm, select something less than 100 beats per minute.

4. Set a Comfortable Temperature

Make sure the room temperature is controlled to help participants stay alert and engaged. Bright, natural lighting is a bonus!

5. Check Your Tech

Some guests won't feel comfortable attending in-person meetings just yet so make sure you have the technology to accommodate video conferencing. With the right equipment, and keeping in mind our tips for virtual meetings, participants will feel like they're in the room!

6. Bring a Technical Troubleshooter

Understand your venue's offerings regarding technical support. Is onsite tech support available? Having in-person support to ensure your AV runs smoothly can be crucial to the effectiveness of your meeting and/or presentation.

7. What About WiFi?

Make sure the internet connection is fast and reliable. If you're showing videos, test them to guarantee the bandwidth can support the resolution.

8. Work the Room

Make use of tools such as whiteboards, monitors, and flip charts to keep the meeting content interesting and energetic.

9. Cover Your Bases

From tape and scissors, to a needle and thread, to Advil and Tums; retreat centers with a stockpile of supplies will be critical in helping to ensure that those last-minute crises don't interrupt your agenda. Ask about printing and copying capabilities to ensure all your bases are covered if you find yourself in a pinch!

10. Consider a Wingman

From coordinating catering to facilitating your meeting, having event staff just steps away to attend to any needs will help eliminate the unnecessary stress caused by managing logistics.

IN-PERSON MEETING CHECKLIST

- ● SELECT A SPACE FOR YOUR NEEDS

- ● PROVIDE FOOD & BEVERAGE

- ● TREAT OTHER SENSES

- ● SET THE TEMPERATURE

- ● CHECK YOUR TECH

- ● WHAT ABOUT WIFI?

- ● CONSIDER A WINGMAN

DATE OF MEETING

GOAL

AGENDA

OTHER TASKS

- ○
- ○
- ○

MEETING NOTES

ASSIGNMENTS

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TALENT WINS GAMES, BUT TEAMWORK & INTELLIGENCE WIN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

– MICHAEL JORDAN

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OUR TOP 3 FRAMEWORKS FOR SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

1. GROW

The GROW framework, which was initially designed for coaching in the 1980s, is excellent in providing structure to meetings and guiding organized discussions.

GROW stands for:
- Goal
- Reality
- Options
- Way Forward

Goal

Set the goal of the meeting right at the start. Depending on the meeting, it can be a topic and objective for the discussion or a review.

When setting this goal, use the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-specific) principle to make it as specific as possible. You should also use the guiding questions you wrote into your agenda to help set this goal.

Reality

Then, ground the discussion with the reality you are facing. Lay out your current situation and status to define the parameters of your discussion. Invite an objective assessment of the situation.

Options

Explore the options that are available to you at that point. Use questions to help everyone in the meeting realize the different options available to them. Make use of brainstorming and voting tools like Pigeonhole Live to display the options available and let all meeting participants vote on them to reach a consensus.

Way Forward

This step is a crucial point in making a meeting effective. As highlighted in the interview with Dr Rogelberg, one of the biggest problems with bad meetings is that they end with no purpose and the attendees have no clue about what was decided. As a final step of the meeting, set concrete steps moving forward. Discuss specific actionables that you can take to address the issue discussed earlier, brainstorm the possible challenges of each action point and discuss ways to overcome them. Then, assign stakeholders in charge of each task and make commitments to follow up on the action plan.

2. THE DAILY STAND UP

Daily Stand-ups are an integral part of the Scrum framework of project management. Each day, team members get together for a quick meeting — 15 minutes max — to discuss progress and plan their day. If you've never held a Daily Stand-up (aka a Daily Scrum) before, you might not be sure where to start. Here's a breakdown of what these daily meetings will entail and tips to ensure success.

Most teams hold their stand-ups at the start of each day, but you can schedule yours for whatever time works best for your team and workflow. As long as your Daily Stand-ups take place at the same time each day, you're on the right track.

The agenda is simple. Each person should take turns answering the following:
1. What did you work on yesterday?
2. And what are you working on today?
3. What are the obstacles standing in your way, and who can help remove them?

It's also important to understand that Daily Stand-ups aren't just status meetings. They're forums for discussing any gaps in the team's commitment and understanding of the requirements. Open communication between team members, Scrum Master, and Product Owner is imperative. Because teams are self-organizing, everyone is responsible for reporting to each other, not just to one person.

Using a Kanban board can help streamline this process. By visualizing each task's stages in progress, you are better able to spot bottlenecks, foresee future conflicts, and track everyone's work collectively.

3. AFTER ACTION REVIEW (AAR)

An after action review (AAR) is a structured review or de-brief (debriefing) process for analyzing what happened, why it happened, and how it can be done better by the participants and those responsible for the project or event.

- What went well?
- What didn't go well?
- What caused the results?
- What will we do differently next time?
- What will we do the same next time?

After-action reviews in the formal sense were originally developed by the U.S. Army. Formal AARs are used by all US military services and by many other non-US organizations. Their use has extended to business as a knowledge management tool and a way to build a culture of accountability.

An AAR occurs within a cycle of establishing the leader's intent, planning, preparation, action and review. An AAR is distinct from a de-brief in that it begins with a clear comparison of intended vs. actual results achieved. An AAR is distinct from a post-mortem in its tight focus on participant's own action; learning from the review is taken forward by the participants. Recommendations for others are not produced. AARs in larger operations can be cascaded in order to keep each level of the organization focused on its own performance within a particular event or project.

Formal AAR meetings are normally run by a facilitator, and can be chronological reviews or tightly focused on a few key issues selected by the team leader. Short cycle informal AARs are typically run by the team leader or assistant and are very quick.

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"We host all of our new hire trainings at Spark and they have always made it so easy for us. I know all I have to do is show up and they take care of the rest, which enables me to focus on my meetings, and nothing more."

Alice Finn
VP Talent Development
FirstBank

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