

Meetings! Meetings! Meetings! – David Price

Virtually everyone in the working world attends meetings at some stage. Staff meetings, management meetings, planning meetings, information meetings, update meetings ... they are apparently endless. Research conducted in Australia recently showed that the average manager spent 70% of their time in meetings. When do they get time to *work*?



It really doesn't have to be that bad. There are six keys to successful meetings.

1. Every meeting needs a purpose – if there is no purpose don't meet. Sounds simple doesn't it? Well our research shows that most meeting attendees *do not know* the purpose of the meeting they attend. Most are there simply because the boss asked them to be there without telling them why their attendance was necessary. Most people when asked the purpose replied with the *frequency* of the meeting – not the purpose – things like “We always meet on Friday mornings” not the purpose.
2. Every meeting needs a clear and detailed agenda. Most meetings have either no agenda or standard, bullet point agendas. These are next to useless as there is no focus or outcome. People tend to do little or no preparation for standard agendas. The more detailed the agenda, the higher the meeting outcomes every time!
3. Meetings need a leader who is *fair, firm and focused*. Leaders who earn respect manage to harness energy, wisdom, knowledge and activity from people who willingly *go the extra mile* for them. Great leaders know how to earn this respect.
4. Every meeting needs an agreed and clearly understood process for decision making. If you decide by consensus, what does that mean? At what point do you *not* have consensus and if you reach that point, then what? If you vote, what is the agreed majority required? Or does the boss decide and everyone just nods because it is easier? No prizes for guessing the effectiveness of those meetings!
5. Ideas, recommendations and suggestions are crucial for effective meetings. In boards, you have board papers which include recommendations. It should be the same at general work meetings. If a person raises an issue, then they should also suggest their recommended course of action. Without it, you'll just waffle until someone *does* make a suggestion. So get the suggestions up front, preferably on the agenda so people have time to ponder them.
6. Meetings need a clear record - the minutes. Minutes are *not* a record of what people say. They are a record of the decisions that are made and the action that is required. By the way, almost *no-one* reads minutes. They *do* read action lists. The best way to record minutes is to type them directly onto a laptop computer and then email them to the participants as soon as the meeting ends.

If you implement these six keys in your meetings, you'll see a huge improvement in effectiveness. An added benefit is that people will enjoy coming to the meetings and participate inside and outside the meeting more actively and effectively.

David Julian Price is the “*Master of Meetings*”. He consults to organisations on how to improve the effectiveness of their meetings at all levels, from staff room to board room. He holds qualifications in corporate governance and is the author of 3 books about meetings and meeting procedure. Contact David at david@davidprice.com. www.masterofmeetings.com.