



6 Tips to Hold an Effective Meeting **November 2011**

Did you know there are 11 million business meetings each day in the US? And, of those meetings, it has been said that a meeting is an event at which the minutes are kept and hours are lost. To avoid your meeting participants walking away with this sentiment, follow these steps to run an effective meeting.

Identify a clear purpose and supporting goals for the meeting in advance. Articulating a purpose and goals will help you set a results-oriented agenda for the meeting. In addition, the purpose and goals will help you maintain focus throughout the meeting itself and get the meeting discussion back on track if it heads off course.

Provide an agenda in advance to all participants. Agendas include meeting goals, a list of the topics to be covered, an assignment of who will cover each topic, and a time allotment for each topic. Include the time, date and location of the meeting on the agenda. Most importantly, remember that *an agenda is meaningless if it isn't actually used to guide the meeting.*

Assign meeting preparation. When participants prepare something for a meeting, the meeting assumes new significance to the group members. Well-targeted preparation also enables a group to accomplish more in the same amount of time or less.

Use a facilitator. A facilitator is responsible for directing the process so the participants can focus on the content. Skilled facilitators direct the flow of the discussion, address roadblocks, summarize points, and keep discussions on track to ensure a productive meeting. When the facilitator is also a participant, it is important that the group know when the facilitator is “removing the facilitation hat” and “putting on the participant hat” to speak. If all meeting participants need to be fully engaged in the content of the meeting, a third party facilitator who has no “horse in the race” is highly recommended.

Capture key decisions and action items. Meeting minutes or notes do not need to contain word-for-word dialogue. It is most important to document key decisions made and action items that need to be executed as they are identified during the meeting. Meaningful action items include 4 core elements: a description of the specific action item, the name of a person accountable for completion of the action item, the due date, and what constitutes completion of the action item. Documenting the 4 core elements for each action item increases the likelihood of completion and follow-through.

Communicate the meeting notes and use them to ensure follow through. At the end of the meeting, determine how the follow-through on decisions and action items will be monitored and communicated. Include this final determination in the notes, then distribute the notes to all participants soon after the conclusion of the meeting.