Preparation, Preparation, Preparation

Do you <u>need</u> a meeting at all?

The reason to have a meeting is because you will make a better decision as a group than you would have made alone, through the interaction of the participants.

There may be other possible purposes, such as: team-building & creating a sense of connection. **But** a meeting isn't necessarily the best way to achieve these goals. For example, if you're just presenting information, then use email. (If the meeting is meant to ***deal with*** the information, send it out ahead of time so people can absorb it).

What is the <u>purpose</u> of the meeting?

- Every meeting should be able to defend its existence.
- The purpose of meeting should be clear as you plan it. Include it prominently in the notice of the meeting and state it at the start of meeting
- What are the desired outcomes? eg: "Decision whether to proceed with Project X"

Realistic <u>agenda</u>

- Every item on the agenda should be able to justify its place there.
- Criteria:
    - ◊ Requires group interaction of everyone at the meeting
    - ◊ Worth the time.
  If it doesn't contribute to the meeting's purpose, don't add it to the agenda.
- No such thing as "Old Business" or "Business Arising from the minutes" – If it's worth taking up time on the meeting, it should be a formal agenda item. If it's just an information update, then just send an update by email.

  The agenda should identify, for every item:
- Topic / Question
- Person responsible
- Time allotted
- How we'll proceed
- What information is needed? (and should be distributed ahead of time)
- What is the outcome desired? "Who Will Do What By When?"

Order of Agenda   – Put the most important item first
                         – Consider grouping by topic

Who really needs to be there? Why?

- The people who should attend are those who are needed to meet the purpose.
- Consider dividing possible attendees into three groups.
  - Doers and Deciders – those who will make and implement the decision
  - Resource People – they will support the Doers
  - Need-to-Know People – they need to be aware but aren't actively involved
- Only the first group needs to attend the meeting. The others can receive the agenda and minutes and can provide input/feedback as necessary.

At the Meeting

Role of chair at meeting

- Ensure agenda items have appropriate information and are explained
- Set tone, direction, and speaking guidelines
- Monitor time for each item and each speaker
- Facilitate dynamic yet comfortable pace / monitor mood of meeting
- Facilitate structured debate without stifling creativity / provide summaries and guide to closure and decision-making
- Encourage quieter members and prevent domination from more forceful members

If you do it right, chairing the meeting is hard work. Consider separating the roles of Leader and Meeting Chair. The leader deals with the substance of the meeting while the chair deals with the process. It is very difficult to combine the roles effectively, particularly in a large meeting (more than about 12). Even in smaller meetings, consider rotating the Chair position from meeting-to-meeting; it's good training and the experience can make them better participants.

One way to achieve better meetings is to have the group agree to some "Ground Rules" and to have the chair enforce them.

GROUND RULES – Basics

- Goal is to have a fair and efficient meeting
- One subject at a time
- One speaker at a time (after recognized by Chair)
- Focus on issue, not on personality
- Make room for others to share their ideas
- Majority has right to rule. Minorities have right to speak. Consensus is an ideal to achieve, but does not mean unanimity and should not devolve to lowest common denominator
- No such thing as "Old Business" so not re-hashing previous decisions
- Assumptions: EVERYone will participate. EVERYone will act honourably and in good faith

GROUND RULES – Beyond Basics (also important but require more work)

- Start on Time. <u>END on time</u>
  This requires the Chair to be aware of the timings for each agenda item and look at time limits for each speaker, as necessary (more likely in larger meetings)
- There are no dumb questions except (a) ones where answer was in material distributed, or (b) ones that you didn't ask
- Chair is authorized to (politely) call out repetition / digression
  Corollary: If new or tangential topics are raised, officially note them and put them in a "Parking Lot". NB, this is not a "junkyard". Items parked should be reviewed and addressed, but not necessarily at that meeting. If the owner of the idea believes the item will be addressed, they are less likely to bring it up when it is off-topic, and vice-versa.
- Electronics: agree ahead of time not to access.
  That means NO Email / NO Texting / NO Reviewing test results or consult letters.
  To prevent withdrawal, the corollary is that you schedule breaks for people to quickly check for important messages.

Encouraging attendance

People are calculating: is this the best use of my time? Your meeting needs to be a more effective use of their time than the alternative

- Do they need to be at the meeting (are they a Doer or Decider)? Do they know that?
- Are you booking it far enough in advance before their schedule fills up?

- Could they attend virtually (video or phone) instead of in-person? (But see below)
- You may need an individual conversation to find out why they are not making your meeting a priority

Efficient meetings are more attractive

- Punctuality – Start on time. <u>END</u> on time!
- Duration (Parkinson's Law)
- Does every topic need to be on the meeting agenda?
- Mix up the times to accommodate schedules (daytime, lunch, supper / evening)
- Combine with other event, eg: a wine tasting, at the **end** of the meeting.

Virtual Meetings

Virtual Meetings are more complicated to conduct but avoid travel and, overall, demand less time from participants.

- Try to avoid them for major decisions.
- Try to keep conference calls short and dynamic with brief speeches.
- Extra ground rule for conference calls: <u>everyone</u> is on mute unless they're the one speaking.
- It is more important to manage the speakers' list.
    One way to do so is to take a list at beginning and after every 4-5 speakers confirm who's on the list and call for anyone wanting to be added. This allows participants to concentrate on the discussion. Technology can make this process easier.
- Consider going around and calling on every person for input.
    If you aren't doing that, check in from time-to-time on those who are quiet

If it is a Mixed meeting with some present physically and others on phone or video:

- Chair <u>MUST</u> be on lookout for those attending virtually. Keep a reminder card in front of you.
- In order to ensure virtual participants are involved, consider going around and calling on every person for input.
- Require those attending in-person to use the microphones at all times.

Issues Raised by Participants

Some participants intimidating (by body language or behaviour outside of meeting)

- Set and agree upon ground rules: Safe environment / no interruptions
- Call it out (as chair) – Real-time or privately. Are they aware of what they're doing?
- Get people to give their input PRIOR to the meeting and compile document to use at meeting to review the commentary and build from there

Lack of Attendance

As discussed above, the meeting needs to be a more effective use of their time than the alternative. Can try to explain the improvements that are being made to do that. Some may need to see/hear that the meetings are better before they will come.

Consider a one-to-one conversation to underline the importance of the meeting's purpose and the person's critical role in making that happen.

Hard to get decisions made

- Delegate to a smaller committee of interested people (did you need a meeting of the larger group at all?)
- Allow committee to make the decision or just research and make the recommendation