

Holding Effective Meetings

Lynne Brisdon, PCC, & Jacque Small

There are many challenges to face when leading a meeting and how you respond to these challenges will determine whether meetings are highly engaging and productive, or if they are tedious, spiral out of control and become very tense.

How Effective Are Your Meetings?

Being Prepared

Preparation and planning for facilitation of an effective meeting is the first step. There are many resources online to guide you on what to do. A search for [how to prepare and run meetings](#) will offer plenty of useful information.

What is also essential is how you manage yourself when you are running a meeting. Various external challenges arise in meetings and an assortment of internal challenges can get in the way of managing meetings resourcefully.

How you present yourself as the meeting leader has a huge impact on the energy in the room and the quality of the meeting. Whoever leads the meeting holds the position of power in the room. The more resourceful you are in your role the easier it is for you to lead a meeting, and the more productive the meeting.

Handling Distracting Behaviour

Sometimes people create distractions by showing up late, taking calls in meetings or missing meetings. What's the best way to handle these situations? How do you respond?

The first thing to notice is how this affects you emotionally. Does this frustrate you or are you feeling something even more intense, like outrage? Often when we have these kinds of feelings our thinking patterns manufacture a negative interpretation about the situation and we over-react. If this happens, it is unlikely you will respond in a resourceful way.

The best thing to do in the moment is take a deep breath and ask to speak privately with the person afterward. Your conversation can include some of the following questions:

- What is causing you to be late for meetings?
- What would it take for you to respect the team's agreed meeting time?

And if your team has a Code of Conduct or Team Charter:

- What is your understanding of the team code of conduct?
- What could bring you into alignment with the team code?

By having this type of conversation you are letting the person know that their behaviour is

not working for the team at the same time as showing concern for them. Being curious about what is going on in their life lets them know you care about what's affecting their behaviour.

You can find guidelines for creating a [Team Charter](#) online.

Managing Domineering Speakers

Another dynamic that shuts down meeting effectiveness is when a couple of people do all the talking while others remain quiet. Your role as the meeting leader is to engage everyone in the room to benefit from their knowledge.

Engaging people who don't normally contribute requires you to be really present to the conversation in the room and noticing who is, and who isn't talking. Then simply request the following from people who have not spoken:

- John, what could you add to this conversation?
- Sylvia, we would like to hear your thoughts.

After asking these questions, be quiet and don't let anyone else interrupt these people. John and Sylvia have been sitting on the sidelines listening, formulating their ideas, editing them and re-editing them. The quiet person tends to limit their self-expression due to concerns that their opinion is not important or it will not receive approval. For the patient listener these people usually have pearls of wisdom to share.

Managing people who dominate the room is a different challenge. Often, these are quick thinkers, expressive and have a tendency to exclude other's perspectives. There is a tendency to come from the place of "knowing the right answer" and then wanting to express it to receive approval from other participants.

As meeting leader you will likely have to be more direct to manage this and ask the person who is speaking to hold their thoughts so that others in the room can express theirs.

Once again, notice what is happening with your own emotions. If you are feeling apprehension or worry about managing the situation, then you may be over-reacting to the circumstances or making up a story about how someone will react when you ask them to create space for others to speak.

Meetings create all sorts of opportunities for people's emotional reactions, including the leader's. Your challenge is to stay as centered as possible in the present moment and manage the flow of the conversation in the room. Breathing is a good strategy in the heat of the moment.

If your emotional buttons get pushed in meetings you may want to remove them, to make your role as leader much easier.