

Tips for Chairing Effective Meetings

We all attend a variety of meetings, which when chaired and conducted well, can help us to achieve our goals (with the support of others) in a more timely way. By introducing some relatively simple changes to the way we plan, structure and manage meetings, significant productivity gains and business benefits can be achieved, regardless of company size.

If you have the responsibility for planning, chairing, conducting or managing successful meetings, these practical tips will help you:

- **1. Set a specific meeting outcome:**

Ensuring you as the chair, and the meeting participants have a clear outcome for the meeting will bring clarity, purpose and a measure of success to the participants and avoid potentially wasted time. Try our handy [meeting preparation checklist](#) to ensure you have all arrangements in place.

For example, you may set an outcome such as 'To gain an agreement on the key problems with our current invoicing system and produce a list of recommended solutions'.

You will then be able to write your agenda and select the key participants that really need to attend the meeting for each specific agenda item. In addition, you'll be able to plan the time needed and establish the most appropriate working methods that will help you achieve the meeting outcome.

- **2. Circulate an agenda in advance of the meeting:**

Circulate a timed agenda and any supporting relevant documents well in advance of the meeting. This will enable each meeting participant to prepare and fully contribute to each agenda item. As a result you will achieve a more focused discussion and decision making process.

In addition, try to avoid the use of 'any other business' as an agenda item. This will help to retain the focus of the meeting and will enable you to conduct the meeting in the most effective manner.

- **3. Check the meeting room in advance:**

Regardless of who has arranged the meeting environment and logistics, it is always advisable to arrive 15 minutes ahead of the meeting start time. This will ensure the meeting room, layout, catering, lighting and temperature are all conducive to an effective meeting.

Arrange for refreshments to arrive 10 - 15 minutes before the scheduled start time of the meeting. This will help to ensure the meeting starts on time and that you avoid the clattering of coffee cups!

- **4. Manage the time and maintain the scheduled meeting timings:**

Be disciplined and start the meeting on time, regardless of attendance. This will help you run to time and encourage participants to arrive promptly at future meetings.

- Above all, keep track of the time during the meeting (or delegate the task to another participant) to ensure you finish on time. You'll find this will improve meeting efficiency and encourage future attendance of the meetings you conduct.
- **5. Assign roles and responsibilities:**
Dependent upon the size, style and the desired outcome of meeting, it can be helpful to the chairperson conducting the meeting to enlist some advanced support. For example, a minute keeper can record attendance, the key discussion topics, decisions made and the agreed action points, with the support of the chairperson.

In addition, a facilitator could be brought in to increase the meeting effectiveness, by identifying the best methods of group working to achieve the desired outcomes.

As well as retaining neutrality on the meeting content, the facilitator can help by bringing out the best from the meeting participants, and establishing an acceptable meeting code for all participants. This can be particularly useful for regular meetings of a project team.

- **6. Use the timed agenda to guide the meeting:**
A timed agenda will enable you as the chair to keep the meeting discussion structured. As a result, participants' contributions can be kept focused and the closure of each item highlighted.

If you find yourself needing more time, you can jointly decide if you wish to allocate more time to the topic. Alternatively, more time can be scheduled outside the meeting and you could then move to the next agenda item.

In addition, try having a flipchart "car park", to enable you to quickly "park" any comments that are important, but not relevant to the specific agenda item. This will enable the group to remain focused.

- **7. Encourage and manage meeting participant contributions:**
It's vital to encourage and stimulate meeting participant discussion. This is critical to the successful implementation of any decision taken.

Ensure that everyone has had the opportunity to be heard. 'Draw out' the quieter, more reflective participants; whilst managing and controlling the louder, more vocal participants. In addition, you'll also need to constructively resolve any conflict that arises within the meeting.

If necessary, allow time at the beginning of a meeting for participants to get to know each other. For example, this can be achieved through simple personal introductions or running a light-hearted ice breaker exercise, dependent upon the meeting formality.

Note: See [tips on maintaining participant energy levels during meetings](#) to improve participation.

- **8. Summarise key decisions and actions agreed:**
Periodically summarise what has been discussed so far around a specific agenda item. This will help clarify and focus the meeting participants, enabling them to make a clear decision and move on.



KSL Training

Tel: +44 (0) 1635 890450

E-mail: resources@ksl-training.co.uk

Web: <https://www.ksl-training.co.uk>

Capture the action points and decisions during the meeting, then summarise them to the participants, at the end of the meeting.

As a result, the process of then identifying who will take responsibility for achieving each of the action items within an agreed time-frame, will then become easier and may encourage more of a team spirit.

- **9. Review the effectiveness of the meeting:**

Ask meeting participants to review the meeting effectiveness and how successful you have been at chairing the meeting.

This can enhance future meetings, as well as give you some great personal feedback and insights. For example, try asking 'what did we do that worked well' and 'what could we do differently next time'. This can provide some helpful insights and learning.

- **10. Follow up and review the agreed action points:**

The follow up to the meeting is just as important as the meeting itself. It is vital to ensure that the agreed action points are completed within the agreed time and prior to the next meeting.

The first point of any regular meeting that you chair should be to ask those responsible to report back on their progress from the previous meeting. This will stimulate action, responsibility and commitment, and encourage resolution of challenges in achievement of the action points, prior to the next scheduled meeting.

We hope these chairing meetings tips have been helpful to you in considering how to chair and conduct effective meetings.

Related Topics

You may also be interested in our other free resources:

- [Meeting preparation checklist](#)
- [Tips for maintaining meeting energy](#)
- [Customer service tips & techniques](#)
- [Tips for facilitating groups](#)
- [Building high performance teams](#)
- [Developing creativity](#)
- [Performance appraisal methods](#)
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About the Author

Written by [Kim Larkins](#).