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Meeting Disciplines – 2

“The success of any meeting can be attributed to the preparation of the person responsible for calling or running the meeting. Various methods for running effective meetings are discussed below.

- **Establish the Purpose of the Meeting.** When calling a meeting, the person responsible should, in addition to setting the date, time and place, make it clear what the meeting is about, who will be attending, and the type of meeting to be held (update, informational, issue resolution, or coordination). Participants should also be told of any information, research, presentation, or materials they are responsible for bringing to the meeting.
- **Set an Agenda for the Meeting.** Given that every meeting should have a purpose, the person calling the meeting will prepare an outline of the discussion points to serve as an agenda for the meeting. The agenda should then be provided to each participant so they may better prepare for the meeting. The format for an agenda is simply a listing of the topics to be covered or addressed. Regularly scheduled update meetings of standard format usually do not need an agenda so long as all participants are familiar with the format and requirements of the meeting.
- **Time Management.** Long, pointless meetings are detested by everyone. Setting an agenda will focus the meeting on a particular topic or issue, but unless the person calling the meeting exercises leadership and control, the meeting can easily be sidetracked into ancillary or tangential issues. While always sensitive to participant’s input and feelings, the leader should intervene when discussions get off topic or wander into the wasteland of irrelevancy. In some cases such as update meetings, participants should be given time limits to update their areas; but recognize that time limits may inhibit issue resolution meetings and should be used with care in that setting.
- **Meeting Minutes.** Minutes are required anytime an important meeting is held where committee decisions are made. The prime example of this would be in member-owned clubs where various committee meetings make decisions regarding how the club operates. The minutes serve as a record of discussion and voting and may be used to inform the membership of important decisions. Minutes are not usually required in managers’ update meetings, employee meetings, coordination meetings, and issue resolution meetings unless a higher authority desires that minutes be prepared. For instance, a general manager planning a vacation may direct subordinate managers to solve a particular issue while he or she is gone and provide a record of the meeting. In the absence of minutes, all participants are expected to bring pen and paper and to take notes on any important matters covered.
- **Summarize Decisions and Action Items.** In any type of meeting where decisions are made, the meeting leader should summarize what decisions have been made. This is important because often the discussions leading to a decision are far-ranging. Without a clear statement of what course of action has been determined, some participants may leave without an understanding of what was decided. Similarly, if participants are assigned action items (that is, are assigned specific tasks to complete), they also must have a clear understanding of what they are to do and when it must be accomplished.”

- Ed Rehkopf, *Conducting Meaningful Meetings*

Take Away: The most important factor in productive meetings is the preparation and leadership of the person calling and running the meeting.