



Capital Health



LEADING A MEETING

Want to lead your next group meeting, but aren't sure what to do first? Follow these guidelines and it'll be easier than you think!

1. Schedule the Meeting

When scheduling your meeting, consider the information that must be covered, then allocate an appropriate amount of time. Don't try to cram too many agenda topics into a 30-minute meeting. You'll end up going overtime and attendees will become frustrated. On the other hand, don't schedule too much time or the meeting may become slow-moving and get off-topic. Our advice? Being realistic is the best way to allocate an appropriate amount of time for a meeting.

Don't get caught up on halves and wholes. Many people will automatically allocate either 30 minutes or a full hour when scheduling a meeting simply because these quantities of time are common and expected. Schedule a 40-minute meeting if that's the amount of time it takes to cover the subject. Don't feel pressured to fill an hour if you don't have an hour of issues to cover.

Carefully consider who should be attending the meeting. Only invite those whose attendance is absolutely necessary. If there's someone who should know what happened in the meeting, but whose attendance isn't absolutely necessary, send them a quick e-mail outlining the outcomes of the meeting. All of us already attend too many meetings. These individuals will be thankful for that one extra meeting they DIDN'T have to attend that week.

2. Create the Meeting Information

When sending invitations to a meeting, ask attendees if they have any agenda item requests. Once the agenda items have been requested, the agenda must be created at least one day before the meeting is scheduled. This way, you can distribute the agenda to all of the attendees before the meeting begins.

3. Distribute the Meeting Information

When participants have the agenda and access to background information before the meeting, it gives them sufficient time to prepare for any discussions or decisions that will occur during the meeting. This also saves time during the meeting. If attendees come to the meeting prepared, less time will be spent answering background information questions and more time for discussing the important issues. When distributing the agenda, remind participants that it's their responsibility to come prepared to the meeting!

4. Lead the Meeting

Start your meeting on time! Even if all the attendees haven't arrived, begin when you said you would. Adhering to the schedule sends out a message that you're serious about the meeting and expect attendees to arrive on time.

As the meeting begins, provide an overview of agenda items and introduce the overall objective of the meeting. This provides direction for the meeting and reinforces what needs to be accomplished during this time. Introduce each agenda item by mentioning who will speak next and what will be discussed.

As the meeting leader, you're responsible for recording the meeting notes, whether it's on an interactive whiteboard, flipchart or in a notebook. This will free participants from the burden of note-taking and encourage richer, more in-depth discussions.

It's also your responsibility to keep the meeting on track. This means steering the meeting discussion in a way that fulfills the meeting objectives. If you have difficult personalities in the room or opposing views, this can be challenging! Try using sentences such as, *"That's a valid point, but doesn't directly apply to this discussion. Perhaps we should schedule a separate meeting to address it fully."* Or, *"It's obvious there are some opposing views surrounding this issue. Perhaps our time would be best spent working towards a compromise. Any suggestions?"* If a meeting becomes particularly heated, it's best to address what's possible in the meeting but consider hiring a professional facilitator for the next meeting – a neutral leader who's trained to deal with high-pressure, high-conflict meetings.

Items that surface and must be addressed should be assigned during the meeting discussion. Assign a particular individual or group to follow-up on each action item. A deadline and priority level should also be assigned for the action items.

5. Wrap-up the Meeting

At the end of the meeting, the leader should review the action items, who's responsible and by when. This way, everyone has a clear picture of who's responsible for what when the meeting's over.

Another item that should be addressed at the end of your meeting is the meeting process itself. Take a few moments at the end of the meeting to discuss what the group did well during the meeting and which areas need improving.

Once the meeting objective has been accomplished, adjourn the meeting. Even if it's thirty minutes earlier than expected! Don't continue meeting simply because that's what the schedule dictates.

6. Provide the Meeting Information

After the meeting is over; send the meeting information to all the participants. Because you were responsible for note-taking during the meeting, you may be the only one who has this information after the meeting ends. Whether you provide the notes by e-mail or photocopied hand-outs, sharing this meeting information is vital for proper follow-up. It's also a good idea to include a summary of all the action items assigned during the meeting. This acts as a reminder to all participants of who's responsible for what and by when.

1. From *CyberMeetings* by James L. Creighton and James W. R. Adams © 1998 by AMACOM, INC