

How to Lead an Effective Meeting

Leading meetings is an important aspect of a manager's role. Whether your meetings are formal and structured, or informal and flexible, following the advice in this guide will help you lead them effectively.

Make the necessary arrangements

- Try to hold the meeting at a **time and date** that is convenient for all participants. If you use shared calendars in your organisation, it is a good idea to take a look at your attendees' schedules to make sure that your proposed meeting time doesn't clash with any of their other appointments. If anyone is dialling in to the meeting from another country, **be considerate of any time difference** there may be.
- Think carefully about **how long** your meeting will take, allowing an extra 15-20 minutes for questions and answers.
- Identify the best **medium** for your meeting (e.g. face-to-face, teleconference, video call) and make sure an appropriate **location** for the meeting is booked for the necessary amount of time well in advance.
- Make sure your chosen meeting location has all the **equipment and facilities** you might need (e.g. flip chart, projector etc).

Be prepared

- Create an **agenda** for your meeting. Even if you choose not to follow it rigorously at the time, having a written note of all the items you want to discuss will help you stay on track.
- Agendas should clearly indicate the **nature** of each item to be discussed in the meeting, the required **outcome**, the **time** allocated for it, and the **name** of the attendee who will be introducing it.
- **Prioritise the agenda points** so that the most urgent and/or critical items are discussed first.
- If appropriate, **invite attendees to suggest their own agenda points** and **submit their questions for the meeting** a few days before the meeting. This will help to ensure all the necessary items are discussed and that attendees are engaged and feel involved with the meeting.
- Circulate the agenda to all attendees **two to three days** before the meeting, to allow them to prepare. It is also a good idea to send the **attendees any other documentation** that you intend to use in the meeting (e.g. reports, spreadsheets) along with the agenda.
- All key issues, decisions and action items should be captured in **concise, accurate minutes**. If another attendee is acting as minute-taker, spend some time with them before the meeting to explain how you would like the minutes to be recorded. Further advice is available in [How to Have Better Meetings](#).

Choose the right style

- As part of your preparation, **consider how formal your meeting should be**. Informal meetings can be particularly effective for holding regular group discussions, for discussing non-critical issues or for leading meetings with fewer than 10 participants. Formal meetings, however, are more appropriate for addressing serious or critical issues (e.g. the organisation's performance or finances) or for leading meetings where there are several (i.e. 10 or more) attendees.
- In formal meetings, the agenda is **closely followed** and attendees tend to participate at pre-defined points of the meeting, or **when invited to do so** by the chair.
- In informal meetings, the agenda is used as a **loose guide** to help everyone in the meeting stay on track. An appointed meeting leader or chair opens up the discussion but attendees are generally able to contribute to the conversation **more freely** than they can in formal meetings.

Get the meeting off to a good start

- At the start of less formal meetings, you may wish to consider allowing a couple of minutes to allow attendees to **settle down and gather their notes together**. However, for more formal occasions, such as board meetings, or when time is in short supply, it may be more appropriate to get the meeting under way as soon as possible.
- **When you are ready to start the meeting**, thank the participants for attending, and **set some** context before addressing the first agenda point.: remind everyone **why** you are meeting and what the **anticipated outcomes** of the session are

Adopt a clear communication style

- As the leader of the meeting, it is important to articulate messages, ideas and opinions **clearly and succinctly**, and encourage others to do the same.
- Avoid relying too heavily on **technical terms, jargon or slang**.
- Always address participants **politely and respectfully**, and respond sensitively to their ideas and suggestions.
- Use **positive language** during the meeting. This involves phrasing requests, ideas and questions in a positive way, e.g. suggesting solutions to problems, helping and encouraging others and focusing on what can be done, rather than what can't. This will help to foster a positive environment within the meeting, and will encourage attendees to participate more actively.

Listen carefully

- When others are speaking, it is important to pay close attention and **demonstrate that you are listening** to what is being said. This involves

maintaining eye contact with the participant who is speaking, nodding to show understanding, and not becoming distracted by anything else around you. Further advice is available in [Top Tips for Successful Virtual Meetings](#).

- **Keep an open mind** when others offer their ideas and suggestions. Even if you feel confident you know what particular participants are going to say, it is still important to allow them the chance to speak and to give their views due consideration.

Encourage participation

- As the meeting progresses, it is likely that different attendees will contribute their thoughts and opinions at various intervals. However, some participants may not feel comfortable with offering their thoughts unprompted. It is therefore a good idea to ask from time to time **whether anyone has anything to add or suggest** before progressing on to the next agenda point.
- Encourage attendees to **ask questions** and test their understanding as the meeting progresses.

Drive the meeting forward

- **Be firm, but flexible.** As each agenda point is discussed, new issues or topics of discussion are likely to arise. If these are relevant to all the attendees and are pertinent to the objectives of the meeting, it is a good idea to explore these new topics, if you have time. However, it is also important to ensure that the discussion does not stray too far from the planned agenda. If this happens, suggest that you discuss these issues with the relevant individuals after the meeting.
- Ensure that there is a logical process for **making decisions** during the meeting. If decisions are to be reached by mutual consent, check that everyone is in agreement with a proposed solution before moving on to the next agenda point.
- As the leader, you should **manage time within the meeting effectively**. Refer to the timeframes you included in the agenda to make sure that each point is addressed within the time allocated. If a particular agenda item is in danger of running over time, encourage the participants to draw the conversation to a close and, if appropriate, start to reach some decisions.

Close the meeting effectively

- Once the agenda points have been covered and any questions have been answered, it is important to bring the meeting to a **logical conclusion**.
- Try to ensure that a set of **clear outcomes** can be identified at the end of every meeting.
- Aim to distribute **action items** logically and fairly.
- If any issues cannot be resolved within the meeting's allocated timeframe, make sure these points are **at the top of the agenda** for the group's next meeting.

- Finally, **thank participants** for attending and contributing to the meeting.
- Be sure to **send any follow-up documentation to attendees promptly**; you might want to ask your minute-taker to do this on your behalf.

Identify improvements for next time

- After the meeting has taken place, spend some time **reflecting** on how effectively you led the discussion, and whether you would do anything differently in the future. It is a good idea to make a note of these points to remind you of what worked well, and what you might improve next time you lead a meeting.
- You might also find it helpful to solicit some **feedback** from your attendees from time to time to find out how productive they find your meetings, and how effectively they feel you lead group discussions.