



- 3** Agenda input
- 4-5** Agenda format
- 6** What do we do now?
- 7** Resources
- 8** Ask Dr. Developer

SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

Well-constructed agendas lead to effective meetings

By Joan Richardson

Groans seem to be the universal first reaction to the announcement of yet another meeting.

According to 3M, most professionals believe that up to 50% of their meetings are unproductive and that up to 25% of meetings are spent discussing irrelevant issues. "They complain that meetings are too long, are scheduled without adequate time to prepare, and end without any clear result," according to the 3M Meeting Network.

Successful meetings – meetings that produce the results you intend – begin with developing agendas that accurately reflect what needs to happen, developing and following timelines, and evaluating each meeting in order to continually improve meeting effectiveness.

Here are some tips from two meeting pros – David Straus, co-author of *How to Make Meetings Work* and chairman of Interaction Associates of San Francisco and Cambridge, Mass., a consulting, training, and facilitation firm, and NSDC Board of

Trustees president Kathryn Blumsack, who frequently teaches educators about how to improve meetings – about developing agendas that can lead to successful meetings.

Clarify the reason for each meeting.

Why do you need to meet? Blumsack recommends looking at the 10 reasons for meeting that are outlined in Robbie Champion's *Tools for Change* manual.

- Dispense information.
- Make decisions on group issues.
- Solve problems.
- Create new options, visions, directions, and proposals.
- Plan/strategize on group tasks.
- Establish new governance procedures.
- Air concerns.
- Evaluate progress on work.
- Invest in the group's growth and learning.
- Celebrate successes.

The meeting convener creates the agenda with input from participants.

If the group meets periodically, the recorder

Continued on Page 2



Meetings

Tools For Schools

alternatives to meetings

ROUND ROBIN MEMOS

Write a memo. List the names of everyone who needs to see it. Circulate the memo to each person listed. Put your name last so the memo comes back to you.

FYI COPIES OF MINUTES/LETTERS/REPORTS

Copy and distribute with a short note.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Quickly share a brief amount of information with a variety of people.

INFORMAL CONVERSATION/HALL TALK

Happens more naturally. But some who need information may be overlooked.

ONE-TO-ONE CONVERSATIONS

Heightens the listener's sense of importance. Time consuming and may not be consistent.

TELEPHONE CALLS

Good way to gauge reactions as people hear what you have to say. Repetitive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Time saver for everyone except the writer.

BULLETIN BOARD MESSAGES

Easy. Difficult to determine if information has been seen by all who need it.

NEWSLETTERS/WEEKLY BULLETINS

Gets out information to a large group. Time intensive.

BROWN BAG LUNCHES

Voluntary. Not everyone who needs to be there can be counted on to be present.

Sources: *Keys to Successful Meetings* by Stephanie Hirsh, Ann Delehant, and Sherry Sparks and *Mining Group Gold* by Thomas Kayser.

Agendas key to successful meetings

Continued from Page One

can note which business from one meeting requires follow-up at a later meeting. Or participants can formally suggest agenda items.

Distribute the agenda at least a week before the meeting. Note time, date, and place of meeting prominently on the agenda.

Early distribution of the agenda gives all participants time to prepare. Revisit the agenda at the beginning of each meeting. Events may dictate re-arranging, dropping, or even adding emergency items.

Label each agenda item so participants understand how much input is expected from them.

Drawing from Champion's list of reasons for meeting, note the reason for including each agenda item. That will help participants understand their roles and responsibilities at the meeting.

If participants are expected to reach a decision, they will prepare differently than if they're expected to just receive information.

For every decision item on the agenda, the convener also should note the decision-making method (consensus, majority vote, etc.).

Blumsack said group members can become particularly aggrieved if they believe they're being asked to make a decision when the meeting convener wants only their input into a decision.

Set starting and ending times. Assign a time to each agenda item.

Designating the time for each item can help prevent a five-minute information item from becoming a 30-minute discussion item.

"The times are saying that, if you want to get through all of these items during this meeting, this is our best estimate on how much time it's going to take to do that," Straus said.

But Straus cautions that groups shouldn't be inflexible about the times. Instead, groups should make conscious decisions about how to use their meeting time.

Place agenda items strategically.

In most cases, items that will benefit most from the high energy early in a meeting should be placed at the top of the agenda.

But, if a hot topic is on the agenda, Blumsack said she often puts smaller, easier items first in order to ensure they get covered. "I want to move the meeting along and not get bogged down in one issue," she said.

Straus urges caution when doing this. If group members know the issue they want to address is being deliberately delayed they can become angry. If the convener knows one item will require a lengthy discussion, Straus recommends devoting an entire meeting to a single topic rather than trying to jam in other items around it.

Identify a recorder for each meeting.

Having a non-participant as recorder is best, Straus said. "It's very hard to record and participate. Anyone who has a clear stake in the outcome of the meeting should be a full participant," Straus said.

If that's not possible, change recorders from item to item, he said.

Evaluate each meeting as a group.

Evaluating the meeting should be done with an eye towards improving the next meeting, not criticizing the just-finished meeting, Blumsack said.

Straus recommends a two-part strategy for evaluation. First, ask participants what they valued about the meeting. Encourage them to use comments such as "I appreciated John when he did ..." or "I really liked the way that..."

Then, ask participants to focus on improvements for future meetings with comments such as "Let's agree not to make phone calls during the meeting." Or "Let's set realistic times for each agenda item."

At the next meeting, point out how suggestions from the previous meeting have been addressed, he said.

"In this way, the evaluation becomes a continuous improvement tool," Blumsack said. ■

Agenda input

TOPICS OR IDEAS FOR THE _____ MEETING.

PLEASE SEND OR FAX TO: *Name* _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Fax _____

DUE: No later than three days before _____ (*the meeting date*).

1. Place the following item on the agenda:

2. _____ will be available to lead the discussion.

3. Time needed: _____ minutes

4. Type of item:

For Information _____ For Discussion _____
 For Decision _____ (*What type of decision is required?* _____)
 For Evaluation _____ For Our Growth _____ For Solution _____ For Proposal _____
 For Airing Concerns _____ For Fun _____ Urgent _____ Long Range _____

5. Non-group members who should be present for this discussion:

6. Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print name: _____

Agenda format

A *An agenda is a road
map from which you
consciously deviate.*

— David Straus

Co-author of **How to**

Make Meetings Work

Name of group: _____

Date of meeting: _____

Beginning time: _____ Ending time: _____

Place: _____

Reason for meeting:

Special materials needed for meeting:
_____ Calendar _____ Minutes from last meeting
_____ Other _____

Facilitator: _____

Recorder: _____

Timekeeper: _____

Who prepares agenda for next meeting?

What do we do now?

COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR: Distribute a copy of this follow-up sheet to each participant along with the minutes of the meeting.

Group: _____

Date: _____

Summary:

Decisions reached:

Next steps:

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS?	WHEN IS IT DUE?

Learning about meetings

❑ **Building Team Power: How to Unleash the Collaborative Genius of Work Teams** by Thomas A. Kayser. Burr Ridge, Ill.: Irwin Professional Publishing Co., 1994. Identifies four complete, highly detailed steps to improve the work of teams in your schools. Based on examples drawn from business. ISBN 0-7863-0302-6. Price: \$25. Order through your local bookstore or by calling (800) 634-3966.

❑ **How to Make Meetings Work** by Michael Doyle and David Straus. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1993. Describes the interaction method of meeting, a tested way to stop wasting time and accomplish your goals. ISBN 0425-138-704. Price: \$12.95. Order through your local bookstore.

❑ **Keys to Successful Meetings** by Stephanie Hirsh, Ann Delephant, and Sherry Sparks. This manual provides dozens of practical ideas for conducting meetings. Includes 70 ready-to-use forms for different meeting components. Order by calling (800) 727-7288 or (513) 523-6029, or fax (513) 523-0638. Price: \$80.

❑ **Mining Group Gold** by Tom Kayser. El Segundo, Calif.: Serif Publishing, 1990. Guide for managing groups in a variety of tasks, including meetings. ISBN 078-630-4294. Price: \$12.95. Order through your local bookstore or by calling (800) 762-4496.

❑ **3M web site.** From the people who brought you Post-It Notes, 3M offers a number of pages filled with helpful tips on how to do better meetings. Web address: www.mmm.com/meetings.

❑ **Skilled Facilitator** by Roger Schwarz. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1994. Practical guide for leading groups effectively. Goes beyond simply managing meetings to explore appropriate and productive ways to facilitate all types of group work. ISBN 1-55542-638-7. Price: \$30.95. Order through your local bookstore or by calling (415) 433-1740.

Visit the Library at the NSDC web site at www.nsd.org for more articles and references on this and other subjects of interest to staff developers.

About those standing meetings

The fall issue of the *Journal of Staff Development* featured a Sally Forth cartoon that humorously proposed standing meetings as more efficient meetings.

Here's what David Straus, one of the meeting experts interviewed for our lead article in this issue, had to say about standing meetings:

"I think they can be used as quick 'check-in' or awareness meetings. I would not recommend meetings like that for detailed problem solving or discussions," he said.

His firm, Interaction Associates, uses five- to 10-minute standing meetings each morning as a way to quickly inform the clerical staff of anything they need to know to manage the office that day.

NSDC STAFF

Executive director

Dennis Sparks
1124 W. Liberty St.
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48103
(734) 998-0574 Fax: (734) 998-0628

Associate executive director

Stephanie Hirsh
16306 Sunset Valley
Dallas, Texas 75248
(972) 818-1450 Fax: (972) 818-1451

Business manager

Shirley Havens
P.O. Box 240
Oxford, Ohio 45056
(513) 523-6029 Fax: (513) 523-0638

Director of publications

Joan Richardson
1128 Nottingham Road
Grosse Pointe Park, Mich. 48230
(313) 824-5061 Fax: (313) 824-5062

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Kathryn Blumsack, president (1999)
Gaithersburg, Md.
Santee Crowther (1998)
Lawrence (Kansas) Public Schools
Mike Ford (1999)
Wayne Central School District
Ontario Center, New York
Kathryn Harwell-Kee (2000)
Grapevine-Colleyville (Texas) ISD
Kay Lovelace (1999)
Philadelphia (Pa.) Public Schools
Gayle Moller (2000)
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, N.C.
Carole Schmidt (2000)
Tucson (Ariz.) Unified School District
Rosie O'Brien Vojtek (2001)
Oregon City (Ore.) School District
Steve Wlodarczyk (1998)
South Windsor (Ct.) Public Schools

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS STAFF

Editor: Joan Richardson

Designer: Susan M. Chevalier

For information about membership, the NSDC annual conference, or additional copies of *Tools for Schools*, contact the NSDC Member Services office at (513) 523-6029.

For complete contact information for all staff and board members, visit our web site at www.nsd.org/about-us.html or see any issue of the *Journal of Staff Development*.

Ask Dr. Developer



Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask. (At least he thinks he does!)

Plan your response to difficult participants

Q *Every meeting I run seems to have at least one person who causes a problem and prevents the rest of us from dealing with the issues at hand. In the end, all of the participants feel like the meetings have been a waste of their time instead of producing the results we need. What can I do?*

A Well, you're not alone. Anyone who's ever run a meeting has encountered difficult participants. Some passively resist becoming involved; others aggressively try to thwart your efforts to achieve something. No single response is appropriate for every participant.

Training magazine (July 1998) offered these tips for dealing with difficult participants at meetings. As you consider *Training* suggestions, keep in mind that it's best to deal with disruptive individuals in private and after meetings.

THE WARM BODY. This person doesn't participate. He just sits there, not even offering an affirming nod of the head. Try direct ques-

tions to draw him into the action.

THE SIDE CONVERSATIONALIST. This person always has distracting conversations with people sitting next to her. Ask her to stop.

THE INTERRUPTER. He constantly breaks in to forward his own agenda. Ask him to wait his turn.

THE COMPETITOR. She wants to win every point. Remind her that other solutions deserve to be explored.

THE JOKER. This person's constant jokes distract others. Tell him so outside of the meeting.

THE WINDBAG. This spotlight hog eats time with war stories. Cut him off. Tell him others have things to say and time is limited.

THE FACTIONIST. To persuade others to agree with her, she tries to form coalitions to pressure the group to accept her ideas. Point out how destructive her behavior is. If she doesn't stop, don't invite her to future meetings.

THE SARCASTIC ONE. This person can't resist a snide remark. He belittles what others say. Tell him to keep such comments to himself.

THE OBJECTOR. "It'll never work" is this person's mantra. No ideas suit her. Tell her to make her criticisms constructive.

Tools may be copied and used in workshops. Articles may be reprinted with appropriate credit.

NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Member Services
PO Box 240
Oxford, Ohio 45056
Membership info: (800) 727-7288

NON-PROFIT
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 79
Wheelersburg, OH
45694