

Work Meetings Take Real Work

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By Yvonne Nath with guest author [Adam Fried, Shareholder at Reminger Co., LPA](#)

Meetings Directly Reflect Your Organization's Culture

"Bad meetings make bad companies. Meetings matter because that's where an organization's culture perpetuates itself. Meetings are how an organization says, 'You are a member.' So if every day we go to boring meetings full of boring people, then we can't help but think that this is a boring company. Bad meetings are a source of negative messages about our company and ourselves."^[1]

Stop Wasting Valuable Meeting Time

From the manager's perspective, when people are working from home, meetings are essential to keep an eye on progress and to keep teams engaged. From the employee's perspective, those working from home are dealing with the blurring of boundaries between work and life. To protect against employee burnout, managers need to consider the frequency, length, forum, and structure of meetings.

At first, video meetings were novel, fun. On the one hand, they save time as no one must jump in a car to travel to them. However, by removing travel time, we do not necessarily reduce the time that is wasted on meetings.

During times of uncertainty, we can feel aimless and exhausted. On top of that, the distractions of working from home make it more difficult for people to focus, and their attention spans dwindle. Having a sense of control and improving our communications during periods of uncertainty are important for mental health and job performance. One way to achieve this is by having a productive meeting.

Work Meetings Take Real Work

Meetings come in all shapes and sizes and are held for various purposes. If you organize work-related meetings, they should be treated as real work. Take them seriously. Expect certain outcomes.

Effective Meetings Often Incorporate These Practices:

- create and stick to an agenda
- set a clear purpose and goals for the meeting
- invite-only those who need to be involved
- respect start and finish times
- participants should come prepared to contribute
- open and close with strong energy levels
- ensure everyone understands the meeting etiquette guidelines and that these guidelines are enforced

- encourage healthy debate
- participants should leave with clear takeaways, action items, and next steps

Adam Fried, a Shareholder at Reminger Co. LPA, shares ways to navigate particular meeting challenges:

Adam, what inspired you to write this article with me?

Meetings, at their core, are events where people get together to set and accomplish day to day objectives integral to the business at hand. The “meeting” could take the form of buying and selling, setting strategy, teaching and learning, or assigning tasks. While poorly run meetings can destroy a business, well-run meetings can inspire and energize. When I read one of your articles about meetings, I got to thinking about how my mentor aided my career by running successful meetings.

So how did your mentor run a meeting?

He would start by framing the question at hand and then solicit my opinion. After some debate, he would offer a different way of thinking about the problem and then ask that I research the issue and recommend a course of action. His process taught me that there is more than one way to tackle any given problem. Along the way, he instilled confidence in me as his team member.

Can you recall any meetings you had trouble leading?

I remember one unfortunate meeting where I confused the identity of the client, so much so that I started asking this client questions relating to a different case I was handling. My Associate noticed I was talking about the wrong case. She astutely took over the meeting until I could regain my bearings. The point is that a firm culture should instill in team members the power and confidence to do exactly what my Associate did: interrupt the “leader” and bring the meeting back to task.

Go team and what a brave Associate!

What about committee meetings? I think many of us can relate to sitting in a committee meeting where certain people dominate and the meeting gets off track. How do you reset the meeting in the right direction?

Nothing is worse than sitting through a meandering, hours-long committee meeting. A committee leader must be willing to take charge by setting and staying on track with an agenda, while at the same time fostering dialogue and debate. A talented leader will recognize when a discussion has reached its natural conclusion and then shepherd the members on to the next agenda item.

Right on. Ancillary topics can be noted in a “parking lot” and discussed, as appropriate, at a future meeting.

Most attorneys are introverts. How do you run meetings with shy or introverted participants?

Running a productive meeting requires some degree of emotional intelligence. I try to recognize the different talents and personalities of our team members. Someone introverted may prefer doing prep work more than participating in the

ruckus during the meeting. Thus, assigning the task most suitable to that person allows them to contribute to the meeting in a way that leverages their talent and personality type.

What about dissenting opinions – how would you best handle those?

Dissent, if voiced respectfully and not overdone, is one of the great learning tools for the team. Often-times, new ideas form and bad ideas are discarded in the process of debate. Good leaders tend to foster some dissent. The trick is learning when and how to redirect the discussion if the meeting descends into a gripe session. When that happens, I attempt to acknowledge the value of the debate and then tactfully move onto a new subject.

What would you do if someone said something disrespectful?

We work in a high stress, deadline-based environment. When we get tired, people can get snippy. The trick is to respond with humility. If the team members are disrespecting each other, I will intervene and attempt to diffuse the encounter. Sometimes, that may require one-on-one discussions to determine whether there are deeper issues that need to be mediated.

How do you like to see action items communicated during and after a meeting?

We usually identify a to-do list, compiled during the meeting. Towards the end of the meeting, we assign the tasks with soft or hard deadlines. We will then work independently towards the completion of the tasks.

Any other tips for holding effective meetings, Adam?

Be prepared with goals to be accomplished. When the team leader is the “smartest person” in the room, it may be time for a new team leader. The team leader should provide direction and set the paradigm but should let the team members do what they do best: invite ideas and criticism, give the team ownership over the solution, and understand when the meeting is over and wrap it up.

If any readers would like more in-depth guidance for organizing and facilitating effective meetings, please feel free to contact me, Yvonne Nath, at ynath@lawvision.com.

[1]<https://www.fastcompany.com/26726/seven-sins-deadly-meetings>