



Essential tips for top meetings



Introduction

In the meetings industry there is much debate and discussion about meetings - indeed, the foundation of the industry we are part of is based on the importance of face to face interaction.

The dictionary definition of a meeting is 'an act or process of coming together for a common purpose'. Yet many of us feel that we spend far too much time away from our desks tied up in internal meetings with no notable outcomes.

To understand more, we asked clients and contacts to tell us about your internal meeting experiences and the results are fascinating. In total, 88 respondents completed a short survey and, while the value of face to face meetings was recognised, respondents reported that they attend at least one meeting for meetings sake every month.

Based on this research we have compiled 13 top tips to help you have more productive - and ultimately - more enjoyable meetings.

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Executive Summary

Employees attend 40 pointless internal meetings every year.

Workers leave at least three meetings every month with no clear actions, no decisions made and no specific outcomes. Some respondents revealed they spend up to 10 hours per week in such meetings.

More than 95 per cent agree that internal meetings provide a good opportunity to debate and share ideas, providing that important face to face interaction as well as helping to establish relationships, negotiate and speed up the decision making process.

But it is vital that they are carried out in the right way and in the correct environment.



Why are meetings important?



FACE TO FACE
INTERACTION

27%



COMMUNICATION

20%



SHARE IDEAS

19%



AGREE BUSINESS
OBJECTIVES

17%



SHARE IDEAS AND
BRAINSTORM

15%



RAISE ISSUES IN
A SUPPORTIVE
ENVIRONMENT

13%



OPPORTUNITY
TO SHARE
KNOWLEDGE

9%



NETWORK WITH
COLLEAGUES

6%



“The findings of our survey suggest that many of us spend far too much time away from our desks tied up in internal meetings with no notable outcomes,” says Kerrin MacPhie, director of conference and exhibition sales at ACC Liverpool. “The cost of these ill managed meetings to businesses is phenomenal. **Good communication** and **shared knowledge** is the key to success. Meetings are vital, of course, if done in the right way.”

The survey found there are a number of ways in which to hold the most effective meeting, with the number one being to hold it off site. Three out of five people agree that holding meetings away from the office improves the outcome thanks to factors such as a change of environment, lack of distractions and more structure. Only 12 per cent of participants don't think holding a meeting off site improves the outcome. Half hold meeting off site every month.

What factors compel you to take a meeting away from the office?

CHANGE OF SCENERY
LOCATION MEETING SPACE
ENVIRONMENT DISCUSSION
CREATIVE IDEAS TRAVEL
LESS DISTRACTIONS FACILITIES
MOTIVATE STAFF BUDGET



Jon Kelly, managing director of Live Events agency Meet & Potato commented on the research findings from a meeting planner perspective:

“It’s our business to discuss meeting options with clients. Inevitably pre-production meetings are held at the clients’ offices, but we always advise on the importance of holding live events (including the rehearsals) away from the office. It provides an environment without distractions and provides the mental and physical space to harness creativity and discussion.

“We find it really energises the team to be away from the same office environment and have had some of our best brainstorms off-site. Removing ourselves from the daily routine is also a great opportunity for team building.”

“It’s important that these off-site venues have the right space and facilities though so that we maximise the effectiveness of our time together.”

More than 48 per cent agree that the **right room** and facilities are very important and nine out of 10 respondents say that the quality of the meeting improves with factors such as natural daylight, breaking for refreshments and even having the correct room temperature.

“Things like the AV not working properly, or the refreshment trolley rattling in before lunchtime when the meeting is still going on are distractions you don’t need. Time is precious.” adds Kelly.





Distractions during meetings

When asked about distractions during meetings, to phone or not to phone cropped up during the survey citing your friend, or foe, the mobile as the number one distraction followed by attendees holding their own conversations.

Another popular distraction related to the environment, in particular the room being over heated or too cold distracting attendees from focusing on the content of the meeting.

MacPhie adds: "These days, everyone is permanently fixated on their mobile phones or tablets, there is no opportunity to switch off technology and allow our brains to function naturally and in a more creative way.

"We had some interesting feedback from the survey and the majority of participants had some strong ideas about how to improve meetings. A clear agenda was one of the more obvious but others included healthy **food and drinks** to increase energy levels and the chance for breaks with **fresh air.**"

What Makes an Efficient Meeting?

When asked to rank the importance of a number of factors respondents regarded a good facilitator or chairperson to keep the meeting on track - and on time - as the most important.

1.



A GOOD FACILITATOR
OR CHAIRPERSON

2.



OPPORTUNITY TO DEBATE
AND SHARE IDEAS

3.



GOOD TIME KEEPING

4.



ACCURATE MINUTES WITH
CLEAR ACTION POINTS

5.



A CLEAR AND CONCISE AGENDA



Tips for Better Meetings for Top Teams

Taking all of the research and feedback on board here are 13 top tips to ensure your meetings are more productive, energised and beneficial.



1. Make sure you have a **clear and concise agenda**. This was the number one bugbear among respondents as there is no structure without one. This should be circulated in advance of the meeting so attendees know what to expect.



2. 89 per cent of participants think **better timekeeping** would improve a meeting, so try adding time limits to the agenda and sitting with your watch in front of you.



3. You need a **strict chairperson** to ensure attendees stick to the timeframe and the agenda so choose wisely - indeed 95 per cent of people surveyed said a good facilitator was important for a successful meeting.



4. **Go offline** - switch off your Wi-Fi connections... Yes it may sound controversial nowadays but the simple fact is attendees are not engaged if they are busy looking at their phones or tablets. What is the point of being in a meeting if half of your brain is still at work checking and responding to emails? Even 'in session' tweets can be a distraction.



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5. Make sure attendees are frequently fed and watered. It's no surprise that concentration tails off towards lunchtime. **A break** every hour for 10 minutes is the optimum solution, this is probably not practical but should be considered in the planning process.



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6. Network, network, network, oh, and some education. One of the key drivers in attending a meeting is **networking**, catching up, making new contacts, so ensure that time is given to this vital element. This doesn't just mean a quick whizz around the room saying who you are and what you do, it's a 15 minutes 'social' before a meeting starts then ideally one at the end. And definitely over lunch, you can meet and eat.



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7. The lay-out of the room is important. Boardroom style encourages face to face interaction while, for larger meetings, individual round tables for groups - cabaret style - works well. You may even want to consider **stand up meetings**, this will make sure people stick to the agenda. Any unusual attributes really do help to engage attendees - cushions on the floor or sessions outside on the balcony are other considerations for meetings with a difference and creating memorable moments.



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8. The person organising the meeting needs to **make the content as interesting as possible**. This may sound obvious but bear the following stats in mind: if you tell a story during PowerPoint presentations, then 63 per cent of attendees will remember it, but if you present stats then only 5 per cent remember. So, tell a story about stats, it works. It's true what they say, we all love a story as it reminds us of our childhood. Or avoid PowerPoint altogether.



9. Start at odd times and not always on the hour or half past the hour, this cuts down on stragglers. At a recent event delegates were asked to return to session, post coffee break, at 16.22, it worked!



10. There is **no judging**, wrong answers or spelling rules in a brainstorm. This leads to creative discussion, debate and importantly new ideas to take back to the office, however off the wall they may seem. Naturally straying off the main path in these scenarios sometimes gives you the best results.



11. Make sure the attendees are relevant to what is being discussed – this helps to ensure the right person gets maximum value from being in the room.



12. **Joining instructions, pre-event communications and social networking tools must be communicated well** in advance of any meeting, large or small, in addition to knowing what will happen after the meeting so that attendees know what to expect from their time. This makes for an engaged audience on the day but equally gives attendees value before the meeting starts. Remember to summarise action points and next steps, including responsibility and deadlines – and follow up if necessary either with minutes or, for new contacts, a ‘nice to meet you’ message.



13. **Stop calling them meetings.** People often associate the word with formal proceedings - why not call them scrums or huddles or sit downs instead? It sounds a lot more interactive doesn't it?

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As a strong venue team, we are passionate about conferences, exhibitions and the industry we're part of. And with more than 11 years' experience in event delivery (notching up brilliant reviews along the way), we have matured into one of the most well-connected conference destinations in the UK.

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