

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Meetings."

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS IN MEETINGS



We've helped many groups learn how to run more effective meetings. One place where meetings get off track or break down is when someone asks a question. Questions can facilitate productive exchanges or detract from them. Here

are some guidelines for asking questions in meetings that have worked well for many of our clients:

1. Up front, establish when questions can be asked. For example, share that Q & A will be at the end of the meeting ("Please hold your questions until then!"), at the end of each presentation, or at any time during the presentation ("Feel free to speak up!").
2. Wait to be recognized before you ask your question. The flip side of this is for the meeting facilitator to be sensitive to the audience and recognize anyone with a question at the appropriate time.
3. If you can't ask your question when it occurs to you, write it down. This will "save your place" mentally and free you to listen more thoroughly to what comes after you had your idea. You may have a different question after you've listened more. It also lessens your need to hastily interrupt before you forget your question.
4. Ask closed questions to get a smaller amount of information or a commitment. For example "Will you submit that as a proposal to Jennifer before Friday?"
5. Ask open questions ("how" or "what") to get the speaker to talk more or to give more information. For example "How do you want us to contact them?" or "What is the protocol for submitting a proposal?"
6. Tell the speaker how many questions you have before you ask your first question. This will "hold your place" and minimize other people interrupting you before you have asked all of your questions. For example "I have two questions.

The first is how do you want us to meet the federal guidelines?" (pause and let the speaker answer) "OK, my second question is when do you want it done?"

7. Stop talking after you ask a question. If you have additional information that affects the answer, give that information before you ask the question. For example "We just got news of a layoff announcement. How are you planning to staff this project?"
8. Ask "fair" questions that are free of emotional barbs or sarcasm. Let's say you're upset because another team member missed an important deadline. Instead of being sarcastic, you might say something like "When will this be completed?" or "What can I do to help you get this turned in?"
9. Keep questions short, simple, and easy to understand. You may even consider thinking about different ways to ask questions ahead of time. Phrasing a question several ways often "reveals" the best wording.
10. Avoid negative questions because they can be confusing. Let's say you agree with the other person. Think about how to answer this question: "Do you not agree?" Since you do agree, the correct answer is actually "No." No, I do not agree = I agree (two negatives = a positive). Confusing? It sure is. The solution is to just drop the negative. Now, do you agree?

Questions are turning points in exchanges. After you ask the question you turn the control over to the other person. If you want to get something back that is productive and has value, we suggest that you set the stage for their response by asking the best question that you can think of, and deliver it with the appropriate intonation. It takes two or more to make a team. Questions are like bridges. They connect teams and move things ahead. Build your bridges instead of burning them, with better questions!



SEPTEMBER 2002

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LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ The October issue of *The Exchange* will focus on **Public Speaking**.

LOOKING BACK:

- ◆ For previous editions of *The Exchange*, go to our [back issues](#).
- ◆ Re-read the [06/2000 edition: Meetings That Matter](#).

Meetings... are rather like cocktail parties. You don't want to go, but you're cross not to be asked.

Jilly Cooper



Procedure is only as good as the people administering it and the quality of their relationships.

Robert E. Hunter

Helpful Hints:

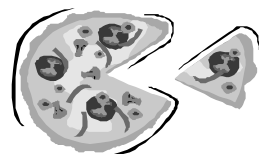
- State the purpose of the meeting on the agenda.
- Start on time even if all are not present.



To learn more about it, click here!

TO MEET OR NOT TO MEET?

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.



Have you ever had a whole week without meetings? It seems like lately when I call someone at their office, they are in a meeting. When someone calls me, I am usually in a meeting. I even have clients who meet once a week to discuss what meetings they can attend (or miss).

What are the reasons we are having so many meetings? Well, the purpose of a meeting is to get key people together to move forward on projects, make plans and decisions, and generate fresh ideas. Ok, stop laughing! I said that is the purpose. Of course you know that does not always happen. Meetings can be time consuming, expensive, and if no results or actions occur as a result of the meeting, they can be seen as a waste of time.

A client recently asked me, "Why is it that meetings do not work?" I asked her if I were to take her to lunch for pizza, what would she order? She said she would have pepperoni and Canadian bacon. I then instructed her to ask three of her coworkers the same question. The first person was Islamic and said only beef. The second was vegetarian and said only cheese. The third, who married a Hawaiian native, asked for pineapple. After we had a good laugh at the variety of answers, I made my point about ineffective meetings. When you put a group of people together to formulate one idea, you get each person's knowledge, experience, and tastes. Sometimes they fit and sometimes they end up like a smorgasbord pizza!

What Our Clients Are Saying

"I think the time I spent with you has greatly improved my delivery... I have a much keener awareness now and think I've made great progress."

Russell Martin, Chattanooga TN

Referring to Talk Is Not Cheap:

"An outstanding and mandatory text for leaders and managers of all levels. Beverly Inman-Ebel's discussion of the essentials of effective and efficient communications are succinct and clear, and a significant review and reminder of their essential application in our everyday lives."

George S. Farris, Springfield VA

Some organizations are quick to have a meeting because it has become their culture. Considering there are several disadvantages to meetings, let's look at some alternatives to meetings that are less expensive, less time consuming, and can still get the desired results faster:

- Make a decision and inform others.
- Send out a memo or an email requesting feedback and ideas.
- Create sub-committees to report pertinent data to the rest of the team.
- Access each other by phone. Most offices are equipped with phone conferencing.
- Post important information on bulletin boards (actual or electronic). Request responses only when necessary.

It takes a lot to run an effective meeting. It is not always necessary to meet in person. Look for ways you can get your office out of the habit of having unnecessary meetings by exploring the alternatives. The next time you feel a meeting is required, ask yourself, "to meet or not to meet?"

ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

Some days I spend well over half of my time in meetings. I do not have time to follow through with my action items from one meeting until I must be at the next one. Suggestions?
Meeting Challenged

Dear Challenged,

If you know the purpose of the meeting, you will be better able to decide if your attendance is required. If you need or are required to attend all meetings, report to the group a reasonable time when you can get the action items to them. Under-promise and over-deliver.

CALLED ON THE CARPET



When was the last time you were “called on the carpet”? Hopefully you never have been! “Called on the carpet” is an idiom that means to be called into a meeting for the

purpose of being reprimanded. In some cases, even worse! These meetings are usually one-on-one. A Human Resources Representative may likely be present. So how does the saying, “called on the carpet,” relate to meetings with you and your boss?

“Called on the carpet” is a British term dating back to 1805. The expression was originally “walking the carpet.” This was said any time a servant was called into the parlor. The servants’ quarters were usually hard and uncomfortable, with floors made of dirt or wood. The lounging areas of the house, such as the parlors, were neatly kept, comfortable, and were always carpeted.

When a servant was to be scolded, he or she would leave their chambers and report to the parlor (or the carpeted room). Over time, the expression “walking the carpet,” and more recently, “called on the carpet,” came to mean that someone was being reprimanded. This is also the meaning as it is commonly used today.

To prevent a future meeting in which you are called on the carpet, remember to:

- Ask questions if something is unclear.
- Listen to what is being said, then ask clarifying questions to ensure understanding.
- Confirm your commitments by stating your responsibilities as you understand them.
- Weigh your options by collecting more data and consulting with key people before making a major decision.

It does not matter how the floor is covered, avoid being called on the carpet!

COVERING GROUND

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

The results of a study conducted by TLC with managers from a large manufacturing company found that 60% of the time spent in meetings was perceived as wasted.

One method for reducing wasted time is having ground rules and guidelines. Remember that ground rules must be followed in every case and that guidelines are recommendations.

Here are some sample ground rules:

- All participants have a shared responsibility for the success of the meeting.
- Handle differences of opinion and conflict constructively.
- Beepers and phones are turned to “silent” or “off.”
- Disruptive or highly emotional behavior is not allowed.
- When a topic or discussion is ruled “off topic” by the leader, facilitator, or group, the participants agree to take that discussion “offline” for completion at another time (the agenda defines “online”).

Here are some sample guidelines:

- Arrive on time.
- Meetings start and end on time.
- Staying on time is a priority.
- Participants come to meetings prepared to handle the topics.
- An agenda should be distributed prior to or at the beginning of every meeting.
- Only those necessary will be asked to attend. Others will be notified of the meeting results on a courtesy or “need to know” basis.
- All meetings have a specific purpose and desired outcomes.
- One person speaks at a time, as recognized or allowed by the leader or facilitator.
- Everyone should have the opportunity to contribute.
- All participants help keep the discussion on topic.
- At the end of each meeting, participants rate on a scale of 0 to 100% how effective the meeting was, or offer feedback on how to improve future meetings.
- An executive summary of the meeting results, responsibilities, deliverables, and due-dates will be distributed within 48 hours.

When everyone who meets has input and buy-in, the expectations for meetings behavior changes. Think about putting the ground rules and guidelines on the back of your agenda or posting them on a wall. When everyone is following the same rules and recommendations, the group can dramatically reduce wasted time and really cover some ground!



Remember to...

- Spend a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting reviewing guidelines of participation and acceptable behavior.
- Have someone be responsible for distributing bulleted minutes of the meeting accenting action items.

Whoever invented the meeting must have had Hollywood in mind. I think they should consider giving Oscars for meetings: Best Meeting of the Year, Best Supporting Meeting, Best Meeting Based on Material from Another Meeting.

William Goldman

The interaction of many minds is usually more illuminating than the intuition of one.

Theodore C. Sorensen



Oliver Wendell Holmes once attended a meeting in which he was the shortest man present. "Dr. Holmes," quipped a friend, "I should think you'd feel rather small among us big fellows." "I do," retorted Holmes, "I feel like a dime among pennies."

Author Unknown

Keep things informal. Talking is the natural way to do business. Writing is great for keeping records and putting down details, but talk generates ideas. Great things come from luncheon meetings that consist of a sandwich, a cup of soup, and a good idea or two.

T. Boone Pickens

TLC, Talk Listen Communicate, LLC

842 S Germantown Road
Chattanooga, TN 37412

Phone: 423-622-8255
Fax: 423-624-4365
1-888-BECAUSE

Email: tlc@talklisten.com
www.talklisten.com

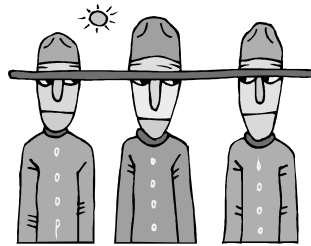
CEO CORNER: "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly"

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

Besides, "You have mail!", sometimes the most dreaded words a busy person hears are, "You have a meeting." Meetings come in all forms and with different levels of expectations. A few are good, some are bad, and others are down right ugly. Let's start with the good.

Last quarter, TLC provided our training, "Meetings That Matter" to a group of leaders within a large corporation. We followed with individual sessions to determine the successful application of this training. The leaders reported that they are now sending out an agenda in advance, staying on topic, achieving appropriate behavior from participants, inviting the right people, and actually ending ahead of schedule. That was good. Ending a meeting early after everything has been accomplished is like giving the gift of time to your people.

I went to a meeting recently that offered a business opportunity. It was supposed to last 45 minutes. Almost to the minute, the leader attempted to end the meeting on time. Then, the co-leader wanted to give a testimony and the meeting continued. My son called me on my cell phone (a definite no-no in meetings, except this one was supposed to be over) and I quietly left to pick him up at church. I returned twenty minutes later and the meeting was still going on. Not wanting to interrupt, I sat just outside the room and listened to the meandering of the topics being discussed. I went into an adjacent room, leaving the door open, to lay down. My aching back was making me a little cranky. Would they ever stop rambling? Who was in charge here? That was bad.



Some time ago, I was a participant in a high level meeting where animosity was being displayed with disrespect to other members. I kept waiting for the leader to address it – stop it. It continued. I offered a mild constructive correction, but it was too little, too late. Two members of this team quit before the

damage could be repaired. That was ugly.

The success of a meeting is everyone's responsibility. Come prepared and on time. If the leader does not end the meeting on time, remind the group of the time and suggest detailed discussions go to sub-committees. Use the "all for one and one for all" approach and stop abusive behavior when it first shows its ugly head. These solutions are much easier to apply if the group briefly discusses guidelines for the meeting at the very start.

Go ahead and M.E.E.T: Make Each Entry Timely. By being a responsible participant, you can prevent the ugly and turn the bad into good. Become an active **part** when you are **participating**. Prepare. Participate. Live your dreams!

FEATURED SERVICE: Meetings That Matter

Save thousands of dollars by having more effective meetings! This one-day training with follow-through will save you time and money and energize your people. A must for every manager! Call TLC at 1-888-BECAUSE. Why? Because your meetings aren't going to go away, so make them better!

TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

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