

For Permanent & Positive Change

The Exchange

FEATURED TOPIC: MEETINGS

A Lot of Information in a Short Amount of Time

Meetings that focus on solutions or idea generation can easily get off track. Too many times one person offers a suggestion only to have it hammered down by someone else. Other times the group likes the idea and spends the rest of their valuable time working on the details, never considering other ideas that remain unspoken.

Creating ideas is a right hemisphere function. Judging them is a left hemisphere function. There is a tool that allows both hemispheres to do their thing in the correct sequence: brainstorm. Think about that name. It is not called brain-shower, rather it is to be a storm of ideas coming quickly and out of no where.

Brainstorm sessions allow the participants to use their right hemispheres to create ideas without editing from the left hemispheres. The brainstorm session is broken into two segments:

- » Right Hemisphere downloading
- » Left Hemisphere judging

Guidelines for the right hemisphere downloading

- » Explain to participants that in the first portion of the brainstorm, the group will go in order and give their response to the question written on the flip chart. Encourage them to say the first thing that comes to their mind without judging or editing it.
- » Ask participants to be relatively short in their responses with a maximum of 9 words.
- » Let them know there are pen and paper for them to jot down an idea as it comes to them.
- » Inform them they can pass if they cannot think of anything to say when it is their turn, however, they can pass only one time consecutively.

- » The group is to refrain from all comments during this portion of the brainstorm. Comments, even positive ones, cause the left hemisphere to interfere with the creation of new ideas.
- » Tell the group how many minutes or how many rounds will be spent in the brainstorm.
- » Begin with one person and go in order around the entire group.
- » The scribe will record the responses verbatim on the flip chart .
- » Near the end of the brainstorm, leave a few minutes to take responses out of order from anyone.

Guidelines for the left hemisphere judging

- » At the end of the first portion of the brainstorm, announce to the participants that now there is discussion time. During this time they may:
 - » Ask questions
 - » Add to the list
 - » Combine items on the list
 - » Discuss the reasons they like or dislike one or some of the items
 - » Encourage all members of the group to contribute to this portion of the brainstorm. Call upon quiet participants, have the group to decide upon the top three- to-five items on the list, stay within the announced time frame, and decide upon the follow-through for the top 3-5 items.

Use this tool to gather a lot of information in a short amount of time. Everyone is included and your people will leave knowing they have contributed and accomplished a great deal. ❖

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Want to Evaluate Your Meetings?	2
Are Your Meetings Above Board?	2
Make Meetings Matter	2
Featured Service	3
Dear TLC	3
Happy Birthday!	3
Chief Officer's Opinion	4

Looking Forward

Our next issue will focus on Not Taking It Personally.

Looking Back

You might also be interested in our June 2007 edition: [Telephone and Electronic Etiquette](#) or read other [previous issues of The Exchange](#).

"The one that listens is the one that understands."

Jabo Proverb

What Our Clients Are Saying

"FYI - I put TLC on my resume as professional development. They asked what it was exactly. It was very cool to explain how it helped me communicate with others' behavioral styles."

Carey Ely, Chattanooga, TN

For Permanent & Positive Change

Want to Evaluate Your Meetings?

At TLC, we have developed a detailed feedback form that members of a meeting can complete to give you feedback. If you would like a free copy, email us at tlc@talklisten.com with the subject line: meeting feedback. We will also send you the score sheet so you can see how your meeting measured up. We ask that the TLC information remain on the form to retain our intellectual property rights. ❖

Are Your Meetings "Above Board"?

Have you ever heard the expression, "above board"? If someone said you were being "above board," that is a good thing.

The expression, "above board," means you are being honest and clear in what you say. In our office meetings, sometimes people are not, "above board." But what does a board and being above it have to do with being honest? We will be "above board" and tell you right now.

This idiom (commonly used expression) dates back to the British parliament several centuries ago. Delegates assembled in meetings. Each person sat in front of a large, solid table. Observers from the audience were only able to see each person from the table (or board) and up. This allowed only the delegate's upper body to be seen and delegates could easily conceal revealing negative, lower body movements.

Our bodies today, and even 1,000 years ago, react in the same way under stressful conditions. According to behavioral science, 55% of our communication is from our body language, wow!

The most common give-a-way revealing we are uncomfortable is when we shuffle our feet or nervously fidget. This nervousness is just energy. Several thousand years ago, when we needed that lower body energy to run from Saber-tooth tigers, that extra energy came in handy. But today, while sitting in boardrooms and meetings for sometimes hours, that energy can make us restless.

During your meetings, to control high emotions, move! Stand up, walk around, or just write down what you'd like to say and put it in the form of a question or a solution-focused statement. This will keep you focused on the task while allowing you to release that boiling energy. ❖

Make Meetings Matter

Vincent Ivan Phipps

Sometimes the most effective way to kill a good idea is to continuously meet about it.

At TLC, our clients tell us they feel that 60% of the time they spend in their organization's meetings is wasted.

Improve the efficiency of your next meeting by following the guidelines about the 3 most important phases of a meeting:

1. Pre-Meeting: Efforts made before the meeting.

- » Determine if the goal can be accomplished without meeting. Use phone conferencing, board posting, or informative emails providing options.
- » Request input from potential attendees in order to identify key points of interest for the meeting. Then set an agenda, including the purpose, and send it to all attendees before the meeting begins.

2. Present Meeting: The format of what is conducted during the meeting.

- » Start and end on time.
- » Re-distribute the agenda that includes the meeting's purpose, and what each person will be expected to contribute.
- » Assign "next steps" and "who's responsible" assignments before concluding points.

3. Post-Meeting: Follow up efforts after the meeting.

- » Send an executive summary (minutes) of decisions made.
- » Follow up on important topics to address any questions or provide reassurance.

Meetings can be time consuming, boring, energy draining, and expensive; yet they are important and are an intrinsic part of our professional culture. Meetings are not going away; therefore, let's improve how we have them.

To maximize the efficiency of your meetings, call the experts at TLC, Talk Listen Communicate, 423-622-8255 (TALK) or visit us at www.talklisten.com.

To learn more about how to improve the meetings with your team, visit the following TLC link: <http://www.talklisten.com/seminars/?id=6y>
❖

Helpful Hints

- ✓ Look for alternatives to in-person meetings.
- ✓ Identify meeting goals before the meeting.
- ✓ Confirm that everyone arriving understands the purpose.

"[C]ommittees with organizational tasks work best under a strong chairman who poses many questions, speaks more to the whole group than to individuals, defines the issues, keeps the discussion on its track, relates the amount of discussion to the available time, and attempts to arrive at group decisions."

Theodore Caplow

"[Our] meetings force you to do your job. You'll find that there are issues that you don't think of and someone else will.."

Edward Kopczynski

"The purpose of a meeting is to bring depth and breadth of discussion to a problem that merits the attention and effort of every member present."

Alfred J. Marrow

For Permanent & Positive Change

Featured Service - Meeting Facilitation

Therese Padgett

Many of our corporate clients, as well as professional organizations, have engaged Beverly Inman-Ebel, TLC's Chief Executive Officer, to facilitate important meetings. The word, "facilitate," means to free from difficulties or obstacles; make easier; aid; assist.

Primarily, facilitation hinges on purpose. The facilitator engages the person who is to call the meeting in clearly defining the goal or goals to be achieved. If a leader is unclear as to his purpose, you can imagine the chaos and frustration among the participants once they get together!

Accountability is another area explored through the facilitator. Who is responsible for what reports/ needed information? Who will make sure the seating arrangements are conversational and the facilities are comfortable? What are the time constraints? Who needs to be in attendance and who does not need to be there?

Armed with this information, the facilitator helps the leader prepare an agenda. The facilitator helps "time-box" the points on the agenda and probes with the leader to determine those participants who may be called upon to lead certain discussion points. Next, and this is most important, the agenda is distributed to all invited to the meeting, well in advance. It is also a good idea to send an email reminder to everyone at least 24-hours pre-meeting. This way, everyone comes to the meeting on time and prepared to actively participate.

At the meeting, the facilitator becomes the "time-keeper" and "referee." A volunteer scribe may be solicited from among the group. As agenda items come forward, the facilitator explains time allowances and procedures; then the discussion begins. The facilitator times-out participants and moves the discussion to the next person. She also notes when someone passes and prevents them from passing a second time, making sure that all have contributions. She makes sure that all agenda items are covered in the time allocated and that the meeting ends when promised.

Feedback can come in a variety of forms and from a variety of people. The best feedback you can get is the timely accomplishment of your goals. Here is a recent feedback Beverly received from Chirag Chaman after a meeting she facilitated in New York: "Thank you again for a wonderful job (facilitating) last Thursday — it was one of the smoothest focus groups I've been involved with."

When you want your next important meeting to be the "smoothest" and free of difficulties and

obstacles, call Beverly at TLC, 1-888-BECAUSE (because you always communicate) to talk about meeting facilitation. You'll be glad you did! ❖

Dear TLC

My office has become saturated with unnecessary meetings. It seems as if we have meetings to discuss future meetings. I know a gathering of the minds is important. As I dislike meetings, what can I do, as head of my department, to improve the long, mundane meetings we have avalanched into?

Signed,
-Mad at Meetings

Dear Mad at Meetings,

Other members of your department probably share you concerns. Here are some suggestions:

1. For the regular status and update meetings, send emails and ask for replies with questions or suggestions.

2. For meetings required in person, have stand up meetings with no food. People are more productive on their feet when there is nothing to snack on.

3. Tell participants the purpose of the meeting and strive to organize important points to keep things clear and simple.

4. Request 360 feed back about suggestions on improving meetings. Listen and incorporate as many of the suggestions as you are able.

If you have to meet, make it matter!

Happy Birthday!

TLC wishes a Happy Birthday to clients celebrating in July:

- » Kathleen Stout
- » Lloyd Carter
- » Elaine Van Paepegham
- » Woody McClintock
- » Chan Phan
- » James Nalley
- » Daniel Homrich
- » Steve Carr
- » Derek Wood
- » Rachel Collum
- » Maureen Burke
- » Jennifer Humble
- » Paul Major
- » Phil West

Remember To

- ✓ Discuss points excluded from the agenda at different times.
- ✓ Follow up on action items decided in the meeting.
- ✓ Send out minutes or reminders about who is to do what tasks.

"When a mission-oriented meeting fails to accomplish the purpose for which it was called, the blame belongs to the chairman."

Andrew S. Grove

"When the result of a meeting is to schedule more meetings, it usually signals trouble."

Kevin J. Murphy

"Perhaps Hell is nothing more than an enormous conference of those who, with little or nothing to say, take an eternity to say it."

Dudley C. Stone

For Permanent & Positive Change

CEO Corner

Beverly Inman-Ebel

Chief Executive Opinion

Meetings are expensive, both in time and dollars spent. They are also important to gather ideas, make decisions, and recognize accomplishments. Since meetings are costly and imperative, it only makes sense to make them matter.

In my opinion, relationships form the foundation for meetings. I recently facilitated an important meeting for OPEN, American Express in New York City. A lot of planning by many people went into this event to make it a success. Twenty key customers were attending. I requested their bios and pictures before the meeting. As I flew from Oregon to Denver, and then from Denver to New York, I drilled myself on knowing who these customers were, studied their respected businesses, and memorized their faces. When they arrived, I was able to introduce myself as their facilitator, calling them by name and asking them a question about their business. By the end of the day, several of them commented to me how amazed they were that I seemed to know them so well, and never missed a name, even when calling out names quickly.

Knowing someone is part of forming a relationship with them. The week before my trip to New York, I met with two different banking institutions to discuss obtaining a loan in order to purchase new equipment. The first visit was with a banker I have known for about 15 years. I have three accounts with his bank. After making me wait for 15 minutes from the time of our appointment, he requested numerous documents, asked me to personally guarantee the loan, and seemed hesitant. He eventually said, "I hate to admit it, but banking now a days is all about numbers." I responded, "Really? I think it should be about relationships." He readily admitted that relationships do count and then went on to say how he valued women business owners, unlike many bankers. I bit my tongue to keep from quoting the statistics on the success of women business owners. I left feeling measured, as though my 26 years in business was devalued.

I immediately went to the next banker with whom I have two accounts. I had never met him. He was waiting for me at the door and engaged me in conversation about what TLC did. He responded that he did not need any additional financial information and gave me multiple options for financing the equipment loan.

Who do I have the better relationship with? The second banker cared enough to make me feel like a customer. And that is the one I will do business with.

When meetings matter, make sure you develop a relationship with the people attending. Businesses don't do business with other businesses. Rather, people in those businesses do business with you. In meetings, people matter. Get to know them and live your dreams! ❖

Comment From a Reader

Good comments in CEO corner. One more thing to gripe about: Sometimes I get emails from good intentioned folks who want to get me up to speed on an email "conversation" they have been having with someone or a group of people about a concern.

I will scroll down to the beginning, which occurred two weeks ago, and they expect me to read all of these back-and-forth emails.

I pick up the phone and ask for a summary version of the issue in 25 words or less.

Doug Swafford, Chattanooga, TN ❖

"Individuals who are repeatedly persuasive in meetings are rarely those who come armed with prepared speeches. Rather, they are individuals who can see other points of view and create compromises or new solutions, who can hold their own views in suspension while permitting themselves to remain a part of the process -- then intervene at the right point to guide the discussion to shore. They tend to choose words and images that integrate concerns of the whole group's thinking. The key is to find common ground and take others' points and use them creatively."

Richard T. Pascale and
Anthony G. Athos

"Why doth one man's yawning make another yawn?"

Robert Burton

"A sudden, bold, and unexpected question doth many times surprise a man and lay him open."

Francis Bacon
