

Making the MOST of Meetings

Do you think you have too many meetings? Are you making the most of your meetings? Here's something to remember — meetings are your job!

BY MARK RICHARDSON

Meetings are how you effectively communicate with each other. Meetings are how you develop synergistic and innovative ideas. Meetings are where you motivate and get aligned on the top priorities. Not many big growers have gone to “world class meeting school” (not sure it exists), so most meetings are a product of evolution and, often, tired habits.

If you were to rate your meetings (overall company/management/sales/production meetings) what grade (on a scale of 0 to 10) would you give them? If you asked many of your team members (management and production) if your meetings are the highlight (or memorable) of the week, would they say yes or no? Do you look forward to conducting these meetings, or are they more of an obligation or a routine?

PART OF YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

Many years ago, I was traveling with a good friend. We were discussing business and my overall stress levels. I said to him that I felt like I am always in meetings and if I had fewer meetings I would be able to get so much more accomplished in a week or month.

He then turned to me and said something that I will never forget, “Mark, meetings are your job!” While this is so simple, it dramatically changed how I looked at meetings moving forward.

When you realize as a leader that it is your job to communicate ideas and vision, it is your job to lead synergistic discussions to make the best decisions, it is your job to motivate and inspire others to achieve or exceed goals — that is when meetings become a forum to make all this happen.

After this revelation I began to look at meetings very differently. Rather than just an obligation I began to see them as an honor to take the business to the next level. I started to treat them with a degree of reverence and with greater importance.

TIPS FOR MASTERING MEETINGS

Here are a few simple tips or insights to help you make world class meetings or at least to take them to the next level.

- 1. Ask “Why?”** — It sounds simple, but many meetings evolve (not by design) and it is rarely questioned “why” we are having this meeting. I always begin with asking myself the three top meeting goals. Are these goals really worthwhile and important? Does everyone understand the three top meeting goals? Are you and the business getting the right ROI from the meeting? By asking why and making it a discussion topic you will be able to raise the bar. Many businesses I have asked this question to have dramatically reduced the number or frequency of meetings while others have added a meeting or two to the monthly blend.
- 2. Make them relevant** — The meeting content needs to be relevant. It also needs to be fresh. After you cover specific updates and metrics, most meetings need to allow equal time for discussion and idea sharing (short and long term).
- 3. Engage the participants** — A great moderator makes sure everyone is engaged in the meeting. If some are not, then it is generally the leader's fault. Try throwing the less vocal members a softball question or simply ask, “What are your thoughts on Jim's idea?” It is important that everyone feels respected and engaged. At the end ask everyone for a highlight and you can judge better the meeting effectiveness.
- 4. Make them fun** — If meetings are fun, people will enjoy them more. You want to address the meeting goals, but don't forget the fun. You might use a personal ice breaker question occasionally or share a funny story. I like to play business games or discussion questions like, “Do we have a tail wind or a head wind and why?” Another question I ask is, “Let's pretend this is a football game and we have just finished the first quarter, what is the game score and why?” By making the meeting fun it not only makes it more enjoyable but also makes it better and more creative.
- 5. Use visual tools and images** — Many people are visual thinkers. If you use visual tools and metaphors it helps the meeting members get it. Whenever you can try to draw a diagram (or ask others to) to illustrate what you are trying to convey. While this can appear to be a little redundant to your words, the likelihood for people to get it is greater. Also use visual metaphors like asking them to pick an automobile that best describes the production team (a BMW or a Ford?) then let them describe why.
- 6. Find the right cadence** — We often like or don't like a movie based on how long or short it is. This is also true for meetings. Finding the right length and the right pace for a meeting is very important. This may take some time to master, but begin by asking the participants how long the meeting should be. Commitment to the end time and tweak it for future meetings. Again, finding the right balance is key.
- 7. Make meetings a priority** — When meetings are a priority they start on time, you and everyone is prepared. It is not OK to miss the meeting casually or be late. Begin to see this meeting as a performance and not just information sharing. Begin with saying to yourself that this meeting is a top priority in my day and the bar will rise.

Being a meeting master takes time. It takes time with your skills but also with the participants getting the “great meeting” dance down. The first step is become a student of outstanding meetings and you will see them through a new lens.

Remember, “Meetings are your job.” ■

Mark Richardson is an author, speaker, columnist and business growth strategist. He has written several books on business management including “How Fit Is Your Business?” and “Fit to Grow.” His latest book is “Control Your Day Before It Controls You: The 7 Steps to Mastering Your Time.” All of his books are available on amazon.com. He can be reached at mrichardson@mrichardson.com.

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