



Make Meetings Meaningful

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

Add Variety to Meetings

Meetings often sound, look and feel the same. Everyone sits in the same chair, drinks the same coffee, and says the same thing every time. Predictability and monotony are the enemies of creativity. Adding variety to meetings can make them more interesting and enticing to attend. It can also make it natural to explore new ideas "outside the box". Here are some ideas to add variety to your meetings:

- 1. Have different people plan and chair different meetings.** This is good not only for variety, but it also forces more members to develop leadership skills. It's great for succession planning.
- 2. Hold meetings at different locations** from time to time. For a multi-facility organization, hold some meetings away from head office and try field locations. You'll get to know the "grassroots" better. You can even hold some meetings out in the sun (or rain), standing up...
- 3. Change room setup** and get people to sit in different places every time. This will break down barriers and give members chances to get to know people they haven't met or worked with.
- 4.** When it comes to complex or controversial issues, **try unusual discussion activities**, to get people thinking "outside the box". For example, get people to articulate the merits of views they oppose. Their opponents will then give them feedback on how well they listened.
- 5. Take time to celebrate successes and recognize special efforts.** Consider symbolic rewards for productive participation, like "the velvet glove award" for diplomacy skills, or the "Speedy Gonzales award" for giving the most substantial content in the least amount of time.
- 6. Have a few light-hearted stories** (short and appropriate), and tell one of them when the group has reached a major milestone. This will break the continuity and add levity to the meeting.
- 7. Have unexpected refreshments and meals**, to surprise everyone and keep them interested. How about potluck, or taking turns providing desserts, or trying unusual international cuisine?



Make Meetings Meaningful

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

Keep Meeting Participants Awake

Some people fall asleep or day-dream during meetings. The following eight ideas will help keep them awake and alert:

- 1. Give each participant a lead role on an agenda item.** No one should sit back and observe for a full meeting. You need to convert passive observers into active and awake contributors.
- 2. Avoid serving sleep-inducing meals before a meeting** (creamy pastas, chocolate cheese cake). Replace them with light and healthy snacks. Alcoholic drinks should definitely be out.
- 3. Try "stand-up meetings" from time to time,** with no tables, no chairs, and no sitting on the floor. Falling asleep will be risky. You will also be amazed at how much time will be saved.
- 4. Schedule short breaks frequently.** There should be no more than 1.5 to 2 hours of continuous sitting. Remember: "*The human mind will absorb only as much as the human seat will endure!*"
- 5. Call on silent members to comment** instead of waiting for them to raise their hands. "*John, you have unique expertise in this area. Can you comment?*" Day-dreaming will be made awkward.
- 6. Diversify your discussion activities** to move participants away from static positions. Example: Break a large group into sub-groups with each handling a key task and then reporting back.
- 7. Prevent rambling and monotonous statements by asking members to communicate concisely.** "*Our time is tight. Is it reasonable to ask you to limit your comments to about two minutes each?*"
- 8. Ask speakers to make their presentations interactive** and avoid protracted lectures. Ensure that they include interesting examples and case studies to keep everyone awake and interested.