

Agenda Additions

Meeting agendas don't seem very complicated. I mean, all you have to do is list a few items that need to be discussed at the meeting – right? Sure, but if you want to have an **effective** meeting, planning the agenda is critical.

A previous article, *What? A Meeting Agenda?*, listed five items to consider when creating an agenda for conducting effective meetings. The five items are:

- Generate possible agenda items.
- Verify that all items on the agenda are appropriate and related to the purpose and expected results for the meeting.
- Keep the meeting focused by not doing too much.
- Prioritize the agenda items to make sure the most important issues are discussed first.
- Set approximate time limits for discussion on each agenda item based on its complexity and relative importance to the purpose and expected results of the meeting.

Each of these items is important, but there are a few other agenda items that should be considered to further enhance your meeting's effectiveness. Since you've verified and prioritized each agenda item with its appropriate time limit, the next thing you might want to consider doing is determine who will lead the discussion for each agenda item.

The person setting the agenda does not have to lead the discussion for each item. This is especially true when team members take turns leading the various team meetings and creating the agendas. Also, consider that the various team members have different expertise and skills, which should be used, and used to, the team's advantage.

So when creating your agenda, be sure to not only list the agenda item, but also to include the team member or members responsible for leading the discussion on that particular agenda item. Ensure that the team members know when they are leading the discussion prior to the meeting since this may require some preparation.

In fact, communicate how all attendees will be expected to contribute. They may need to bring material or ideas around various topics on the agenda. Remember, every team member's input is needed to have a successful team.

Next, decide who should attend the meeting and why. Unfortunately, we have fallen into the trap of believing that just because you're on a team that you should be at all the meetings. This is just not true.

So, determine who should be present to hear, participate in discussion, have a say in the results, share the needed knowledge, etc. Invite **only** those people whose attendance is necessary. It might require attendance and participation by key stakeholder or others, and it might exclude some team members.

Try to keep the total number of attendees to no more than eight. This can be done if you allow attendees to come and go as their contributions have been completed **and** they don't need the information discussed before or after their contribution. This may affect the order of items on the agenda.

Some teams adopt a “peel off” agenda where not everyone has to stay for the entire meeting. According to the book, *Engineering Management* by Murray Shainis, Anton Dekom, and Charles McVinney, “All members must come for the beginning, but as their roles in the meeting end, they can ‘peel off’ and leave.”

According to Ron Fry in the article, *We’ve Got to Start Meeting Like This*, “if your project meetings seem to be swallowing too big a chunk of your workday, maybe it’s because there are too many people taking part in the meetings. As a rule, three groups are involved in any decision making process:

1. Those who will make the decision.
2. Those who will approve the decision.
3. Those who must be informed of the decision once it’s been made.

“When you’re trying to reach consensus, it’s best to include only the first group – those who will make the decision. Then you can bring the other groups into the loop at the appropriate time.”

One way to communicate the meeting’s topics, who should attend, and the preparation required is to distribute the **proposed** agenda prior to the meeting. Most experts recommend that it be sent to team members for input several days prior to the meeting – a week, if possible.

According to Wayne Baughman of Creative Presentations, the agenda needs to be communicated to those who will attend the meeting prior to the meeting because it allows team members to include additional agenda items. However, Baughman cautions that agendas should usually contain no more than three to five items, which should be tied together with transition statements to help the team stay on target and give a logical connection of one item to another.

Finally, distribute the **finalized** agenda based on input from team members **prior** to the meeting. Again this allows preparation for the discussion and lets team members know if they are expected to attend.

With a thorough agenda, the recorder can help track who attended, location, time, suggestions, comments, assignments, resolutions, etc. Team members’ initials can be used to note who said what and track the flow of the discussion, not every word.

Don’t let your agendas be a waste of time. Make them a valuable communication tool that enhances the effectiveness of your meetings.

(For more information on creating effective meetings, check out Meetings: A Roadmap to Success eWorkbook at www.Self-StudyCourse.com.)

Susan Otto, the president of Training-Modules.com, LLC, is committed to effectively partner with organizations and their employees to achieve strategic initiatives necessary for organizational success. Susan designs customized facilitator and participant guides for companies that want to do their own internal training. Contact her at 859.292.0095 or susan@training-modules.com. For information about Susan’s training modules, visit her website at www.training-modules.com.

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