



Meeting Management

From F. John Reh, Your Guide to Management.

Meetings can be very productive. They can also be a waste of time. Here are some ways to improve your meeting management skill.

Stand PAT

I use a "PAT" approach to meetings. A meeting has to have: a **P**urpose, an **A**genda, and a **T**imeframe or I don't do it.

You should be able to define the **purpose** of the meeting in 1 or 2 sentences at most. "This meeting is to plan the new marketing campaign" or "this meeting is to review shipping's new policy for handling returns." That way everyone knows why they are there, what needs to be done, and how to know if they are successful.

Set an **agenda**. List the items you are going to review/discuss/inspect. I like to assign a time limit to each agenda item (see below) and identify the person responsible to speak or moderate the discussion.

Set a **timeframe**. At the very least set a start and end time. I also recommend setting a duration for each item in the agenda. These should total to the overall meeting timeframe.

Don't Wait

Meetings need to start on time. Don't wait for stragglers to show up. When someone arrives late, don't go back and review what has already been covered. That just wastes the time of the people who showed up on time for the meeting.

If the meeting organizer/sponsor doesn't show up on time, consider the meeting cancelled and go back to work. How long to wait for the organizer to show up varies among companies, but I wouldn't wait any longer than 5 minutes.

Keep and send minutes

Someone, other than the meeting organizer, should keep minutes of the meeting. How detailed these are depends on the nature of what is being discussed and the skill of the available note taker. If you set an agenda in the first place, as you should have, the note taker can use that as an outline. The minutes should record who attended, what was discussed, any agreements that were reached, and any action items that were assigned.

Soon after the meeting, usually within 24 hours, the minutes of the meeting should be distributed to all who attended, any invitees who did not attend, and anyone else effected by the discussion. Email is a great vehicle for distributing them. Distributing the minutes informs those not at the meeting of the progress that was made and reminds everyone of their action items.

Stay Focused

Every meeting should have a "topic keeper". I like to ask for a volunteer at the beginning of the meeting. The topic keeper's job is to interrupt whenever the discussion strays from the topic under discussion. These new topics can either be tabled until later or scheduled for their own meeting. There is a fine line between what are amplifying remarks