



## **MEETINGS**

### **6. How to overcome problems at meetings**

*Meetings, whether they are one-on-one discussions or gatherings of five or twenty people, are an important part of working life – but they are also time consuming. Many people often say they are unproductive, costly, boring and many times unnecessary. Are they always needed? And so many of them?*

*Today, I will outline a series of pointers to assist you decide if the latest meeting you have organised or been invited to, is really going to lead to improved efficiencies, better communication and improved profitability.*

- 1. How to prepare for a meeting**
- 2. How to conduct a successful meeting**
- 3. How to compile a meeting agenda that really works**
- 4. How to get the most out of meetings you chair**
- 5. How to make a valuable contribution to a meeting**
- 6. How to overcome problems at meetings**
- 7. How to deal with disruptive individuals at meetings**
- 8. How to reduce the number of time consuming meetings**

### **6. How to overcome problems at meetings**

*This is the sixth in a series of eight “How to” guides.*

#### **1. When, the discussion runs off track**

- *Meetings may often run off track, or get bogged down in time consuming discussions, to get the group back on track,*
  - i. Refocus the discussion by indicating how the group has strayed from the objective*
  - ii. Summarise the discussion to date and link progress to the objective*
  - iii. Bring the discussion back into line by posing a question that relates to the agenda item*

#### **2. When, the participants lose interest**

- *Often caused by lack of concrete short term goals or successes, declining enthusiasm can be turned around by:*
  - i. Propose a success-guaranteed, short-term task to be completed*



- ii. *List the achievements of the group to date*
- iii. *If the current topic lacks interest, introduce a related theme to encourage a more active response*
- iv. *Check whether the individual participants are still in agreement with the group goals*
- v. *If participants believe that a decision has already been made, assure them that solid arguments from an interested group could amend or reverse the decision*

### **3. When, there is uneven participation**

- *Reluctant speakers may be brought into the discussion by asking questions that you know they can answer. Compliment them for their views offered, or*
- *Ask everyone, in turn, to express an opinion, before anyone else can discuss or evaluate the issue further, and*
- *Restrain the talkative tactfully*

### **4. When, the meeting gets overheated**

- *The immediate need is to cool all hot-under-the-collar participants, by:*
  - *Summarising the hot issue, giving participants the chance to calm down*
  - *Appeal to other members, thus using group pressure to restore order: Can anyone suggest a way of getting Chris and Sharon out of their no-win situation?*
  - *Suggest that the current issue be dropped for a while and another line of discussion be pursued*
  - *Call firmly for order, stating that progress is being hindered through a lack of objective reasoned discussion*
  - *Suggest a coffee break*

### **5. When someone is distracting the group**

- *If you have a side-talker, pencil tapper or paper-shuffler, there is a very real chance that they are bored, they've lost interest or they don't feel included, or the issues being discussed are irrelevant to them. Why not try;*
  - *Looking directly at the offender*
  - *Naming the offender and asking a relevant question*
  - *Tackling them in public, indicating that they are making it difficult for the group to get through the agenda*
  - *Taking a break and discussing the problem with the offender in private*

### **6. When an argumentative person takes over**

- *Often if a participant continually argues over minor points, the group itself will sometimes show its impatience. If this is unsuccessful, try;*



- *Request that positive and helpful contributions be made*
- *Give him/her a job to do – taking minutes, recording points on the whiteboard*
- *Break the meeting into small groups, giving the offender a small group only to distract*
- *Speak with the offender outside during a break*

### **7. When a long-winded participant dominates**

- *Try:*
  - *Politely interrupt the speaker and suggest that it is now time to hear from other participants*
  - *Say, 'I think we have been over this before'*
  - *Fire a different question at the offender to halt the flow of words*
  - *Discuss the problem in private with the talkative person*

### **8. When two people dominate discussion**

- *When you have two people dominate, with others simply looking on, try;*
  - *Summarise their arguments by saying, 'Is this what you two are saying?...'*
  - *Involving other participants, 'What do others think about this?...'*

### **9. When a decision can't be reached**

- *Make it easier for participants to evaluate the pros and cons of the issue:*
  - *Summarise the discussion to date*
  - *Restate the issue or question clearly*
  - *Reiterate the goals or decision criteria*
  - *Take a short break or postpone the decision until the next meeting*

### **Success tip.**

Meetings, like voyages through space are strewn with potential problems. The Chair and members, their sights set on a successful conclusion, have to guide their way through uncharted territory with care without at the same time becoming to obsessed with the difficulties, as to do so will only slow down their progress and even perhaps distract them to such an extent that what they fear worse will happen – the meeting will self-destruct somewhere in space. *Jack Gratus, "Give and Take", BBC Books London 1990*

Reference: Flanagan, N. & Finger, J. "*Just about everything a Manager needs to know*" Plum Press Brisbane, Australia 1998.