



Quality Check for Meetings

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

For most of us, meetings are our most significant time-wasting activity. If you have not found yourself frustrated while sitting in a useless meeting with no escape, you must be a hermit.

The interesting thing is that we, the participants, really do have the power to manage these interfaces between people in ways that are productive, impactful, and fun. In this article, I want to focus on a simple quality check as a means to improve meetings.

The way time is used in meetings is a part of the overall culture of a team. Managing meetings well is one activity that will improve team performance, but it should not be done in a vacuum. It should be a part of an overall process to improve trust and accountability within the team. Leaders normally set the pace for what goes on in any team, so they need to take a lead role in managing meetings for better outcomes.

I advocate that teams have a quick evaluation at the end of each meeting. The leader simply states the following. "Our time is precious, and meetings use a lot of time. It is our responsibility to make sure we are making the best use of every minute. How many of you think this meeting was an excellent investment." The feedback can be in the form of a quick discussion, a questionnaire, or, if trust is high already, just a thumbs up for good, thumbs down for bad. Of course, if a binary vote turns out to be mostly negative, a conversation needs to take place to understand the specific issues. It can take less than a minute, but it gives a quick feedback. The other benefit is that it lets people know the leader is not clueless and is open to suggested improvements for next time.

For this method to be fruitful, the leader must establish an environment of trust. People need to know they will not be punished, in any way, for giving their opinions. If the leader reacts well to comments, even if the input suggests the leader is wasting the group's time, then trust will be enhanced. Another benefit occurs if the leader includes other people in planning future events to prevent the same problem at the next meeting.

It is critical if the leader does such an evaluation that he or she follows up and actually makes the changes suggested. A subsequent time check should not bring up the same issues. If it does, then stronger action is required before going further. The leader is responsible for the follow up and modification of meeting processes, even though he or she may ask for help from others as well.

This quality check allows everyone to take ownership of the meeting process to ensure it is vital and adding value. If there are problems in the meeting format or content, they can be addressed before the next meeting, so bad habits are not proliferated. I urge you to add this simple check to the end of all your meetings. It will pay big dividends.

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