

10 Tips to Strengthen Your Team

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Effective meetings are interesting, high-energy events where team members work together to make decisions or solve problems. Unfortunately, too many of the meetings we attend seem to be just the opposite. The worst meetings bring time to a crawl leaving everyone mentally and emotionally exhausted and more than a little bit frustrated. The difference is in how the meetings are planned and run.

The best managers understand the importance of these events and they understand that producing a great meeting takes planning and deliberate effort. This article offers ten tips to help you take advantage of this valuable collaboration time with your team.

10 Tips to Strengthen Your Team Meetings:

1. Have a positive attitude about meetings. This is the single most important thing a manager can do as a leader to improve team meetings. I'm shocked at how many managers are proud to proclaim their dislike of meetings. In order to achieve significant results, solve problems, make decisions, inform, inspire, collaborate, and motivate, managers need to work with people. That means occasionally getting those people together in a room or on a conference call and actually talking to them. Managing isn't about sitting in the office with the door shut sending emails. As a leader, try looking at meetings as the manifestation of leadership. It's leadership show time, not something to dread like a trip to the dentist.

2. Remember, you own the meeting. Don't delegate the agenda planning to an administrative assistant or another team member. As the leader, it's *your* meeting.

It's your job to plan and run the meeting. To put yourself in the proper frame of mind, ask and answer the following question: "After this meeting, what will I want people to have learned, achieved or solved?"

3. Always prepare an agenda. Every article you will ever read about effective workplace meetings includes advice on preparing an agenda.

Yet, we still show up to meetings where there is no agenda to be found. The act of planning the agenda helps you focus and identify the priority topics for the meeting.

4. Ask for input on the agenda. Although it's the manager's primary responsibility to develop the agenda, team members can be invited to contribute agenda items. Send out a call for ideas a few days before the meeting.

5. Spice it up! Put a little variety in the format. Here are a few things you can do to spice up your team meetings:

- Invite guest speakers
- Celebrate something
- Conduct a "learning roundtable" – have team members take turn teaching each other something
- Watch a Ted Talk that's relevant to the meeting agenda
- Run a team-building activity
- Change locations (consider taking the meeting off-site)
- Bring in some fun or interesting food
- Have a "single item agenda" meeting
- Ask for lightning round updates
- Engage the team in brainstorming
- Switch chairs; switch *anything* to break up the monotony

6. Allow some "white space" for spontaneous creativity and engagement. Don't cram so many items into the agenda that you struggle to complete it. Instead, leave some room at the end for spontaneous discussion. If the meeting ends early, then let everyone go early.

People appreciate found time as well.

7. Use team meetings to collaborate. Instead of just sharing information, try solving a problem or working with the group on arriving at a decision. Yes, it's challenging and can be messy, but that's where we get the most value from meetings.

8. Lighten up. Being the leader of a meeting isn't about flaunting authority or abusing power. Chastising someone for being late in front of the team is an example of doing this. Have a sense of humor and humility.

9. Follow-up. Keep track of action items and make sure people do what they say they are going to do. It's frustrating to show up to the next meeting and find out half the team didn't bother doing what they committed to in the last meeting.

Follow up before the meeting and hold individuals accountable to their commitments.

10. Be a role model leader. Team meetings are not a time to let your guard down and kick back with your team. Hold yourself and your team to the highest standards of conduct, which means no off-color jokes, picking on team members, cynicism and sarcasm, or bashing other departments or management. Think about the kind leader you want to be known for, and then show up to each and every meeting *being* that leader.

The Bottom Line:

An opportunity to meet and work with your team is a horrible thing to waste. It is imperative that you develop the discipline to plan and lead meetings that people value and that push initiatives forward.