

THOUSAND EIGHTEEN



BEST MEETING PRACTICES



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The meetings that you schedule with your peers or potential business partners are only as effective as you make them. Unnecessary distractions or lack of preparedness can not only be detrimental to your professional persona, but they can damage the success of your meeting and waste your peers' time. In order to avoid a professional blunder, consider the following when setting up your next meeting.

Punctuality

We have to talk about this because unfortunately, it's necessary. In all business, one of the simplest things to do is be on time, but for some reason it doesn't happen as often as you'd expect. If you're one of many Americans that struggle with punctuality, I have a simple formula guaranteed to help you be more punctual and instantly boost your credibility

This applies mostly to doing business in the big city where traffic can be treacherous. The best thing about my simple formula is the execution is equally as simple. Ok, here's the blockbuster formula you can charge your friends for.....add 15 minutes to every 30 minutes expected travel time. (Allow 45 mins for each 30 min trip, allow 90 mins for a 60 min trip etc.) It's not complicated at all. The odds of arriving late with this formula are slim, even with unexpected delays like construction or a fender bender.

If you arrive late, the odds are, though they may forgive you for it (publicly), the person you're meeting has now made a mental note just as you would. If they're credible, it matters to them. If it matters to you, which I assume it does, it's best to estimate door to door not just area to area. Always remember, commute hour doesn't just matter on main streets and highways, after school and special event traffic should always be considered as well. Additionally, it's always best to consider the amount of time it takes to park in different conditions such as street parking versus a parking structure which in both cases require walking distance and time before actually arriving at your seat. Remember, you're still late even if you're at the address but still parking. It's always best to consider the things you would if you're going to a job interview or punching in at your day job , the time clock only cares what time you actually punch in.

Create an Agenda

Always identify the specific purpose of your meeting. Just simply agreeing to meet can easily include wasting precious time. In most cases there are several items to discuss in a meeting and though you may still get to them all, getting to a solid conclusion can take more than twice as long. In addition to having an agenda, it is just as important to share it with others beforehand. This allows others to prepare answers and potential questions in advance keeping the meeting moving along smoothly. This also helps to remember all the things you want to address. We've all been there when we felt good about a meeting and later realizing we forgot to ask a specific question. Having an agenda also gives you a visual account of your progress which helps to manage your time.

Stay Focused

Now that you have a written agenda, the success of your meeting may very well be determined by your ability to remain focused on the task at hand. Since you're an entrepreneur, technically you're on your own time and therefore the duration of your meeting may not concern you quite the same as it would on a 9 to 5 partially because you're going to get paid for your time. However, when you're self-employed, every minute counts and the moment the meeting starts to lose direction and becomes less effective you're losing time, productivity or money.

Anyone can get distracted at any time especially when an unexpected interesting topic makes its way to the table. It's always good to have a polite but effective go-to term to get the meeting back on track. My personal favorites are "Hey, we should definitely revisit that soon." or "That sounds interesting, I'm gonna have to look into that" then politely make a note of it to show interest.

It's also a good idea to be mindful of the locations you choose to have your meetings as well. Sometimes the location itself can be a distraction. Places with high foot traffic, televisions and even places that serve food can completely derail a meeting. Unless it's that time of day where a meal is also in order, it's probably best to avoid meeting where there's food altogether. A place like Starbucks that's known for its light eats and beverages are always a good fit for those moments.

Equally important is to avoid multitasking whenever possible. Yes, I'm taking about that cellphone. No need to go down the entire list of reasons why not to engage your mobile device while conducting a meeting but its just not a good idea. Sorry to break the bad news to you but doodling while in a meeting can be a bad habit too. Many times your "doodles" can begin to take on an identity and suddenly it becomes interesting and therefore a distraction.

Stay focused and you'll get the most out of your precious time.

Take Notes

The point of your meeting is for you and your attendees to come away having garnered new information about a project, partnership, or other business-oriented endeavor. This means that you will need to take notes of individual responses to points on your agenda; if particular duties or deliverables are assigned, you'll want to be sure you not only have the names of the people undertaking those particular tasks but their contact information as well. Don't be afraid to take advantage of a personal shorthand, and, upon the meeting's conclusion, offer to share your notes with your attendees. Your diligence and professionalism will be much appreciated. Taking good notes can be critical to the effectiveness of a meeting.

Good notes now can mean one less meeting or phone call later

Do Your Research

Depending on who you're meeting, you may have to do some professional, personal research in order to ensure that you've gotten in touch with the right person (s). Look into your attendees' business portfolios, if they are available; alternatively, explore any professional websites or career-oriented social media that bears mark of their involvement. Going into a meeting knowledgeable of your attendees' skills and professional history ensures that you won't spend your limited time hashing out broad details and instead allows you to get down to the nitty-gritty much more quickly.

[Bonus] Don't hesitate to contact their current and former vendors or customers to see what type of track record they have.

Keep Your Goals in Mind

Keeping your meeting goals in mind is essential when trying to ensure that your meeting remains as efficient as it needs to be. This is where a well-prepared agenda benefits you. If you feel like your discussion with your peers is becoming sidetracked, you can always refer to these pre-established goals and reorient the conversation accordingly.

The effectiveness of your meeting is just as important as the meeting itself. They can definitely be time consuming and in some cases downright inconvenient but they're necessary. With that in mind, it's in your best interest to get the most out of them. Follow these steps and you'll be on your way to being more productive and a better business person vastly increasing your chances for success.