

THE ART OF RUNNING A MEETING

Everything is ready—just as you planned it. The meeting has a clear purpose, and you want everyone present to work together to accomplish the objective in a reasonable period of time. Here is how you can make the meeting go well.

1. **Start on time**, no matter what. If you can do something in your introduction that latecomers will be sorry they missed, all the better.
2. **Be enthusiastic**. It's contagious. If you seem hell-bent on accomplishing your goals, your people will be too. Conversely, if you take a lackluster approach, they'll join right in.
3. **Use body language** that says you are in charge. Sit tall. Look at people directly. If you look as if you know what you are doing, the other participants will think you do.
4. **Speak with authority**. If you have prepared and rehearsed, you've got it made.
5. **Don't pontificate**. Keep the meeting moving with questions, discussion, probes and keep it on track.
6. **Avoid the seven deadly sins** of meeting leaders: resenting questions, monopolizing the meeting, playing comic, chastising someone in public, permitting interruptions, losing control, coming unprepared (the greatest sin).
7. **Orchestrate and pace** the meeting with your agenda. Call on the upbeat people, avoid lulls, don't call on two bores back-to-back, keep participants' focus on your goals.
 - **Don't send a full agenda**, just a brief version in the meeting invitation. Participants without an agenda in hand tend to listen more and to focus on the content and the leader. You avoid the "Oh, no, look how much we have yet to plow through" feeling, and heighten interest.
9. **Be diplomatic**, considerate. Listen.
10. **Dig for weaknesses and strengths** before the final decisions are made.
11. **Use humor** (not jokes) that comes naturally out of the exchange. Humor is a relief.
12. **Praise people**. Thank them. Let them know you appreciate them. A pat on the back helps everyone work better. — E.S.

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TALK MACHINE AND OTHER MEETING PERSONAS

People bring their personal baggage to meetings. They will unpack their meeting personalities, their company loyalties, their pet peeves, their hidden agendas and heaven knows what else at your feet. As the meeting leader, you will have to deal with all of it, most assuredly their meeting personas. Here are some ways to handle the most common ones:

The Talk Machine. This person usually has something to say all the time, about everything, whether anyone wants to hear it or not. Sometimes good ideas spill out, so you don't want to shut him up altogether. **Solution:** Communicate a sense of urgency. This tells him to make it brief. Point to your watch. Or jump in with "that's an interesting point, Charles, let's see what the others think about it." Or compliment him and tell him it might be better if he write down all his ideas and submitted them to the group for deeper study. Or let the group handle him.

The Silent One. A lot of people are silent in meetings most of the time, and for very good reasons. They may be listening to get the whole story; they might agree with what's being discussed; they might not have anything new to add. But the truly silent ones are a leader's concern. They might have something valuable to say, but shyness or nervousness keeps them buttoned up. **Solution:** These people lack confidence and need your support to get past their inner barriers. Call on them when you know they can shine when they answer. If their answer will give the other participants useful information, all the better. Compliment the silent one for the contribution. Use the person's name: "Excellent. Thank you, Jane."

The Argument Maker. There is usually one person in a group who loves a debate, an argument, often as a diversionary tactic. This is not the person with a legitimate complaint; this is the whiner, the truly argumentative one. **Solution:** Keep your cool. Do not take anything this person does or says personally (even if it is intended that way). Don't get involved. Instead, do the same thing you would with the legitimate complainer: Offer the argument maker's hot item (whatever) to the group. Let them thrash it out. You aid them by guiding the discussion, probing, stimulating, mediating, if necessary, in the contest of ideas.

The Suggestion Squelcher. You call a meeting so that people can share their suggestions, comments and ideas. This cross-pollination in a face-to-face meeting is to be encouraged, but the suggestion squelcher has other ideas. She tries to ridicule all suggestions—good or bad—because they are easier to deride than facts or opinions. Those who offer their suggestions do so at a risk to begin with, and if they are laughed at or put down they will no longer be a resource for ideas at your meetings. **Solution:** A leader who compliments suggestion makers, in spite of the squelcher, will get more suggestions. Tell the squelcher that all suggestions are welcome. Then put her on the spot by asking her to produce a better one than the one she just knocked down. —E.S.

