

Planning Powerful Meetings

What makes a meeting *powerful*?

- It has a defined purpose and goal.
- It uses time and people effectively.
- It creates results and actions.
- The world is different after a powerful meeting -- heck, *YOU* may be different after a powerful meeting!

How can you plan a powerful meeting? By following these easy-peasy tips, which work for both in-person and online meetings.

Tip #1: Clarify the Purpose and Outcome

You know that meme that's circulating, the one about how we're going to find out which meetings could have been emails after all? Well, most often meetings suck because they lack clarity of purpose and outcome.

Be clear and specific about the purpose of the meeting. Is it to decide something? To share information? To gather information? Just to socialize? Or because we have a standing meeting on this topic and we've always done it this way? (Red flag!)

Ask yourself:

- WHY are we meeting?
- What OUTCOME will it produce?
- What will be different after this meeting, that won't happen unless we meet?

If you can't answer these questions, then do not collect \$200 and do not pass go...and DO NOT have the meeting!

Tip #2: Clarify the Process

Once you're super clear about why you are meeting and what outcome it will produce, it's time to work out the process, or agenda and logistics, of the meeting. Consider:

- Who needs to participate? What expertise, information or perspective will they provide? Resist the urge to invite Bob just because his feelings will be hurt if he isn't invited, or because he always brings snacks or quippy one-liners. If he serves no real purpose (for this meeting), leave Bob to be productive on his own.
- How long will this conversation take? Just because your calendar program defaults to one-hour time blocks does not mean your meetings need to be an hour long (or more). What could you accomplish in 15 minutes? 30 minutes? 5 minutes?

Planning Powerful Meetings

- Consider time allocations for each part of the meeting, if it will cover several topics, and if it runs longer than a couple of hours, consider breaking it up into shorter chunks of time to maintain focus.
- What structure should the meeting take? Again, if the purpose is to decide something, what information is needed to inform the choice (and can it be provided ahead of time, or does it need to be presented during the meeting)? And, what process will be used to make the decision -- a vote, a decree by the senior person, flipping a coin?
- How will information be presented or shared? Will there be slides, handouts, discussion, brainstorming, drawing, dancing? What tools need to be in place for this to happen?
- What other supports or tools will you require: Someone to take notes? Someone to keep track of time? A stretch break in the middle of a longer meeting?

I usually create my agendas so they look something like this:

Purpose:

Outcome:

Participants:

Process:

Topic	Results	Lead	Time	Tools/Notes
Welcome	We're all acquainted	Jilly	5 min	List of participants
Topic 1	Brainstorm options	Kate	15 min	Zoom break-out rooms
Topic 2	Decision	Flo	15 min.	Prep: Review white paper
Etc.				

Hot Tip: save time and effort by capturing decisions and actions on a soft copy during the meeting.

Planning Powerful Meetings

Tip #3: Clarify Roles & Expectations

Ever been to a meeting where everyone thought someone else was creating the agenda, or taking notes, or bringing the snacks? Yeah... how'd that go? Set your people (and yourself) up for success by clarifying who will do what, and let them know well in advance of that meeting time.

Consider and build in time for:

- Your preparation: what will you need to have ready, handy or be able to reference?
- Their preparation: what do they need to read, think about, share or bring?
- Your follow-up: what will you need to do or deliver following the session?
- Their follow-up: what will they need to do or deliver?

As I've shared before, it's helpful and important to establish ground rules or agreements for any conversation, meeting or workshop. Share behavioural expectations ahead of time, and review them once the meeting starts.

- If you're meeting online, is professional attire expected or are yoga pants and messy hair okay?
- Are folks expected to sit upright, or is it okay if they are lounging on a bed or couch with their laptop resting on their belly?
- Is it okay if they are making dinner during the meeting or call?
- Should video be enabled or shut off?
- Should everyone be muted unless they are talking?
- How will you ensure everyone takes turns talking?

Think about the behaviours that will help the meeting be productive, and then create agreements to enable clarity so participants can get on board and get to work.

