

Leadership & Professional Development: Evidence-Based Strategies to Make Team Meetings More Effective

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*“Without meeting leadership skills, one joins the ranks of so many others who bear the responsibility for the meeting ‘problem’ and are the cause of so much frustration in the workplace.”*¹

Physicians, like so many others, often feel that team meetings are inefficient, a waste of time, and mentally draining. It does not have to be this way. There are evidence-based strategies that can make meetings truly work and actually enjoyable to attend.² This is particularly important because eliminating meetings is a false solution. Hospitals need team meetings to promote coordination, collaboration, communication, and consensus decision-making. While no one individual can solve the meetings problem, each of us can find a meeting we lead and make it work better.

First, recognize that, as a leader, you are a steward of others’ time. As a steward, be intentional when designing meetings. Think carefully about who needs to be there, how much time to spend on the meeting, and how the meeting should be run. Dysfunction increases with meeting size, so *invite attendees wisely*; include only those essential to the meeting. For individuals not in the core group, offer them the opportunity to share their input premeeting if desired, share good meeting minutes with them, and welcome them to attend future meetings if desired. Consider “representative voices”—openly asking certain attendees to represent a group of stakeholders. Use a timed agenda to invite certain people for part, but not all, of the meeting.

Keep your meetings lean and deliberate. Avoid defaulting to one-hour meetings out of habit. Parkinson’s Law suggests that people will fill the time allotted to a particular task. If a meeting can be done in 30 minutes but is scheduled for 60 minutes, chances are that people will use the full hour. If a decision is reached faster than anticipated, end the

meeting early. Refer back to your steward mindset and schedule meeting time with intention.

Meetings are often experienced psychologically like we experience interruptions. Thus, when attendees arrive at a meeting, express gratitude. Your job is to keep attendees active and engaged; therefore, facilitate the meeting actively and creatively. Try out different techniques such as devoting a few minutes to silent, written brainstorming. Leveraging silence gives attendees the opportunity to think on their own before contributing to the discussion and results in nearly twice the number of ideas.³ Perhaps members can be assigned explicit roles such as devil’s advocate, or each attendee can be assigned a specific agenda item, invoking responsibility and participation. If you always sit during meetings, try standing. If you have never tried a walking meeting, give it a go. Attendees appreciate mixing things up.

Lastly, remember to check-in with attendees to see how things are going. Never get too comfortable as a meeting leader, especially since meeting frustration abounds. Asking your team for feedback will carry over to other aspects of your role. You will be seen as a conscientious leader, open to exploration and professional development. This builds trust and creates a positive, collaborative work environment.

While you cannot control how others run their meetings, you do have the ability to make a meeting that you lead truly work. Be intentional with your role as a meeting facilitator and focus on the whole experience. Evaluate and learn from your team, show others that you care about your meetings so that they begin to care about theirs too.

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References

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