

PEOPLE WHO RUN GOOD MEETINGS: THE REALLY DO EXIST!

Most people hate going to meetings. They get tired of wasting time, off-the-topic discussions, and generally not accomplishing much. Each meeting participant bears a certain amount of responsibility in these situations, of course, but the majority of the blame falls squarely on the person charged with running, or facilitating, the meeting.

A good chair knows how to make sure the meeting proceeds smoothly, makes the most of the time allowed, and that everyone who participates feels valued and heard.

Common mistakes made by most people who run meetings Many people who run meetings have little training. They will make some common mistakes, such as:

- Running the meeting in a dictatorial style
- Giving his or her opinion first
- Viewing themselves as "in charge" or "the boss" of the meeting
- Ignoring quiet people or those who don't actively participate
- Focus on the results they want, not the results that the group wants

You have probably found yourself in meetings where these behaviors are evident and you probably also know that those meetings are not very productive. And perhaps you have even done some of these things yourself when you were running a meeting.

The good news is that anyone can become great at running meetings. It just takes some knowledge and understanding of what it takes to improve followed by practice and continuous improvement.

Characteristics of a great meeting chair If you have ever had an opportunity to be in a meeting run by a great chair, you know that his or her skills can make a huge difference. But have you ever paid close attention to exactly what that person does during a meeting that makes him or her such a good chair?

Most people who run great meetings share the following characteristics:

- Focus on the process of the meeting
- Runs meetings in a friendly, welcoming atmosphere
- Has an appropriate sense of humour
- Listens a lot and says very little
- Reads and understands the nuances of body language and non-verbal communication
- Acknowledges and manages conflict
- Skilfully manages and balances people, tasks, and results
- Understands that the more agreement there is in a meeting, the more successful the resulting action(s) will be

Some of these characteristics are obvious, others are more subtle and you have to pay close attention to notice them. The next time you are in a meeting that is being well run, look for these characteristics and take note of the key behaviors that occur.

Key behaviors of someone who is good at running meetings These can vary somewhat, but most commonly include:

- First words on any new issue are "What do you think?"
- Give their own opinion last
- Speak after others have spoken
- Call on and draw out quieter people
- Clarify and check for understanding of discussions, words, actions and resolutions
- At the end of each agenda item, ask the minute taker to read aloud what has been recorded and check for agreement within the group

How can you become great at running meetings? There are a variety of other steps you can take.

Training - get some training.

Practice Take what you have learned and put it into practice. Don't try to change everything at once, but do pick two or three things to start with and gradually add in more as you become more comfortable with the "new" you.

Mentor/Coach If you know someone who is already excellent at running meetings, ask him or her to mentor or coach you on your technique. Your mentor may be someone who regularly participates in meetings you generally lead, or you can arrange to have him or her sit in and simply observe you.

Tell Others In some cases, it is helpful to let others know that you are working on improvements so that they can support you and help you along the way. This tends to work best in smaller groups where there is a strong bond or trust level established.

Feedback Ask for feedback after every meeting, but make sure participants have a mechanism for providing it that is discreet and allows them the freedom to be specific.

Why bother to go to all that effort? The ability to run a great meeting is not just a nice skill to have so that people will enjoy participating in your meetings. It is a career-enhancing skill that generates better results from your meetings, and it makes you more valuable to your employer.

Think about it for a moment. When you go into a meeting that is going to be run by someone who is lousy at it, what is your attitude? Do you go in willingly and happily, ready to do your best work? Or do you dread it and just try to get through it as quickly as possible?

People who run great meetings get the most from the people around them and attract people who want to do their best. And that is worth every bit of effort it takes to develop and hone your skills.