



ENABLING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN PRACTICE

Tower Hamlets

Our Latest Newsletter

(15/07/2019)



Guidelines for good meetings

Meetings. Ahhhh, meetings. The place I spend 75% of my life in. (The other 25% is spent painstakingly writing and editing these comms.)

Few of us love meetings or find them formidably useful. Like everything, however, this is less about *what* you do, and more about *how* you do it. Because meetings can be good. Really good, even. Smart people have spent decades trying to nail the science of what makes a meeting good. What follows is a distilled summary of that science. You're welcome. J

1. **Prepare for the meeting.** Do not just pitch up and expect other people to make your time valuable. If you care about your time, check out and influence the agenda beforehand. Make sure it includes:
2. **The purpose** of the meeting
3. **The topics**, ideally with a one line summary of each
4. **The lead person** per topic
5. **Time estimates** per topic

Most of all, make extra sure (this is what I find trickiest in Tower Hamlets, but we are getting there) that each meeting includes:

1. **A warm up** (five minutes to free everyone's mind from their work and the outside world, an exercise to "land" in the room)
2. **An agenda review** – a chance for everyone to change and shape the meeting
3. **A meeting evaluation** (more on this in a future comms)
2. **Start on time.** Forreal. No "the morning clinics overran" etc. On time. This shows that at the time it's scheduled, the meeting is the priority, and most of

all, the people attending it are the priority. One person arriving late sends a message to all the others.

3. **Fill key meeting roles.** This takes some discipline, initially, and can feel a bit artificial, but is a great exercise in efficiency and efficacy once the muscle has been formed. In case this has slipped from your memory of EQUIP training, or in case you've been in the borough for five minutes or less, the roles are:
 4. **Meeting leader:** this person opens the meeting, reviews the agenda, keeps the team focused, helps the team use appropriate decision making methods, stays on topic, and helps the team evaluate the meeting. This person is, in other words, a bit of a ninja. This person is not a chair, because chairs are furniture, whereas healthy leadership is shared and changes hands.
 5. **Meeting facilitator:** this person facilitates discussion and manages participation, making sure each person is heard, and that no-one hogs the floor. This person will look to the back of the room, where Tom has been sitting silently (this has never *ever* happened), and say "Tom, we haven't heard from you on this topic yet, what are your thoughts?".
 6. **Timekeeper:** this boss moves the team along by keeping track of time during the meeting. S/he has a phone with a timer next to her/him, and gives one or two minute warnings when time is running out, allowing the team to steal minutes from other agenda topics as an explicit decision, or wrap up convos.
 7. **Notetaker:** this person records key topics, decisions and actions, and distributes the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting – ideally, on the same day or the next, when meeting memory is still fresh and relevant. Note: minutes circulated a couple of days before the next meeting get far less engagement than minutes circulated straight after!!! Straight after, people still care – the priorities have not yet been trumped by life. And minutes need not be long – no one likes taking them, no one likes reading them. Key points and decisions are more than enough. We will not be saving them all in a time capsule to explain life on earth to aliens once the planet implodes from climate change. *Just. Key. Points.* No literary awards for minutes. A template is attached if helpful.
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4. **Improve the meeting process.** Meeting are a nothing more than a process, and like all processes, they benefit from evaluation. If you are dreading a meeting, chances are, you haven't evaluated it for a while. And to improve the meeting process, you need to **evaluate every meeting**. This is down to the meeting leader, who needs to be enabled to ask:
 - How did this meeting go?
 - How was the pace, tone and flow of the meeting?
 - Did we get stuck?
 - Did we stay on topic?
 - Did we listen well? Stay factual? Answer each other's questions?
 - What might we do differently?
 - What was just right, and should be celebrated and continued?
 - Any other thoughts, feelings, observations....?

So how do you do this, how do you evaluate each meeting....?? There are a few ways:

- **Round-robin comments.** Live, in the moment, go around the table, one by one, where everyone gets to speak. My favourite method!
- **Written evaluations.** A simple form is filled out, summarized and discussed by the team, there and then.
- **Open discussion.** Anyone speaks in any order.
- **Thumbs up, sideways, or down.** This is Tom's favourite method – everyone signals their evaluation with their thumbs, and explains why.

In a nutshell.....:

Meeting evaluation form				
Our meeting today was:				
Rambling	1	2	3	4
Focused				
The pace was:				
Too fast	1	2	3	4 Just right
Everyone got a chance to participate:				
No	1	2	3	4 Yes
Our purpose was:				
Confused	1	2	3	4 Clear
We made good progress on our plan(s):				
No	1	2	3	4 Yes

1. Plan	2. Start	3. Conduct	4. Close	5. Follow up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify meeting purpose and outcomes • Identify meeting participants • Select methods to meet purpose • Develop and distribute agendas • Set up room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in • Review agenda • Set or review ground rules • Clarify roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover one item at a time • Manage discussions • Maintain focus and pace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize decisions • Review action items • Solicit agenda items for next meeting • Review time and place for next meeting • EVALUATE THE MEETING!! • Thank participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute meeting minutes promptly • File agendas, notes and other documents • Complete the actions assigned to you

And to close, a rule of thumb that I love. Useful for meetings, but also for so many other places, such as having tea with your best friend. Wishing you a chance to exercise this rule at some point during this sunny weekend. Have a lovely one, folks!

The "100 Mile Rule"
Once a meeting (or tea with your best friend) begins, everyone is expected to give it their full attention. No-one should be asked from the meeting unless it is so important that the interruption would occur even if the meeting was 100 miles away from the marketplace. Turn off mobile phones or set them to vibrate - and be 100 miles away from everything else. ©

Virginia

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