Meeting Musts

By Kinnery

I cannot see anyone running a successful business successfully without being able to hold successful meetings. If businesses are about a team of people working effectively and efficiently together meetings must be an integral part of that process, and yet for most of us our experience is that meetings are boring, ineffective and to be avoided at all costs.

So the question is how do we run meetings that are not boring but are effective and efficient?

I have written elsewhere about the meeting rhythm, the original Rockefeller Habit, and its effectiveness in setting the heartbeat of the firm. The question I am addressing here is how we make those meetings effective and efficient.

I think there are three golden rules that if we stick to will make our meetings both effective and efficient. They are:

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Purpose

Agenda

Time

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I am referring specifically to the regular meeting rhythm, but these rules also apply in the most part to any other ad hoc meetings we might organise.

1. Purpose

I would never propose a meeting for meetings sake but often this is how meetings develop. To counter this I recommend that if you cannot define the purpose of the meeting in detail that you don't hold the meeting.

What is it that you are trying to achieve?

Once again, clarity is power, and being able to be very clear about the purpose of the meeting will allow you to be equally clear about who should attend, what the agenda should be and often when it should be held.

Begin with the end in mind, as Stephen Covey recommended. What (specifically) do you want the outcomes of the meeting to be? What do you want to happen as a consequence of the meeting? Why are you holding it in the first place? I would argue that you cannot have enough clarity on this subject.

Think in ink. Write it down, so that any discussion can be measured against this pre-determined criterion to assess whether it should be part of the meeting or not. When you are clear about the purpose of the meeting you will be able to make better decisions about who should attend and pay attention to golden rule #2.

2. Agenda

If you know why you are holding a meeting you should be able to construct the agenda. That way people who are attending will know, what they need to bring, how they need to prepare

and what is expected of them at the meeting. This is all the more important for those regular rhythmic meetings which we should be holding.

The agenda provides a consistency and a structure. Meetings aren't meant to be a pressure cooker or a memory test. If you have gathered your firm's best brains together you want them to be working at their optimum, so provide the environment which allows them to do so.

I recommend a fixed agenda for regular rhythmic meetings, so that the attendees absolutely know what information they need to bring and they can be expected to be 100% prepared for the meeting.

The agenda should be constructed specifically to deliver the outcomes for the meeting that you have already decided upon.

In fact I would also recommend that the purpose is typed up at the top of the agenda so that everyone remains clear on the purpose of the meeting at all times.

You may think this is unnecessary but ask yourself how many meetings have you attended or do you attend where the purpose has never been defined or has been forgotten or indeed allowed to slip?

3. Time

Not only do you need a confirmed start time but you should also have a committed finish time. Otherwise it is very difficult for your team members to manage their priorities if they don't know whether the meeting is going to last for an hour or three. Do them the courtesy of letting them know.

Keep the meetings as short as possible whenever possible. For regular rhythmic meetings remember that there will be another one next week, and the week after and the week after.

I have noticed that when businesses begin having meetings two things happen. There is usually pushback from the attendees, "Oh not another meeting" and "We have so many meetings we can't get our work done". These objections are inevitable but sticking to these three golden rules should minimise this.

The second thing that happens is that despite their objections people tend to bring more issues to the meeting than there is time to discuss. Remember you don't have to get through it all the first time around. You will have another opportunity next week and then again the following week.
If you don't manage these two situations the meeting will crash and burn and you will be further back than you were when you started.

Being able to manage meetings is a key skill for any business leader.

On a scale of 0 to 10 where would you rate your proficiency at managing meetings? On a scale of 0 to 10 where would your team rate your proficiency at managing meetings?