

How to run an effective staff meeting

Most leaders conduct staff meetings with their teams; it's where they share updates, solve problems, and produce alignment for the course ahead. I believe it's essential for the leader to hold regular staff meetings, and always recommend a specific schedule, timeframe and agenda that are easy to execute.

First, I think leaders should conduct staff meetings every week, and it's important to set and stick to the same day and time (Mondays at 10 am, Thursdays at 3 pm, etc.) because it gives your direct reports a consistent schedule by which they can set their weekly calendars. Second, most staff meetings should be just you and your direct reports. This is important if you have a large team... it's hard to have a constructive discussion with a large group in attendance. At least three times a month, meet with just your direct team – if you want to invite guests or others from your extended team, do this no more than once a month.

Third, adherence to a consistent agenda can mean the difference between accomplishing your goals and wasting valuable time. I recommend this simple agenda, which can be used every week:

- **Leader's Update (10 minutes)** – this is a quick summary of important issues; it's the leader's chance to provide details about what's happening higher in the department, or around the company. These updates are FYI in nature.
- **Team Member Round-Robin Update (20minutes)** – each team member provides an update on 1-2 critical projects or issues in their world. Ideally, these issues should be of interest (relevant) to everyone at the table. These updates should be brief and FYI only.
- **Big Issues (60 minutes)** – the bulk of the meeting should be devoted to an open discussion of 2-3 critical issues that impact everyone on the team. These discussions can be led by any team member, and should follow one of three general formats: FYI, input, or decision. That is, each "big issue" topic is either intended as an extended FYI, a solicitation for input and feedback from others (gathering & seeking reactions), or as a means toward reaching a specific decision.

I recommend the leader solicit agenda items from the team (both the round-robin updates and the Big Issues section) about 2-3 days before the meeting. Once the leader has chosen the specific items that will appear on the agenda, he or she distributes it to the team at least a day in advance of the meeting.

What's the optimal duration of the weekly staff meeting? As you can see above, I think 2 hours is a reasonable amount of time to spend with your team each week in this kind of open dialog. This should be enough time to really dig into some of the big issues facing your team, and should allow you to keep things moving forward on a weekly basis. If you're augmenting the staff meeting with regular 1:1's with each direct report, that should be all you need to keep a steady hand on the management wheel, freeing up the rest of your week for significant contributions up, down, and across the organization.

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The weekly staff meeting is a critical management tool when it's conducted in a regular, efficient manner. Don't be afraid to let your team debate and really wrestle with important issues. The more open the discussion, the better people feel about attending and contributing to your meeting (and the more likely you'll be to get great input). Take charge of your staff meetings by adopting a disciplined rhythm and cadence, and start bringing your people together for a respectful dialog about what's most important to the team's mission.

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