

Resuscitate Your *Staff Meeting*:

10 Strategies to Get Your Team Up and *Running*

Turn the staff meeting around and fully engage your team and it can help you boost productivity, increase the effectiveness of decision-making, head off emergencies, reduce the number of problems that require your attention and create a smoother running, more profitable operation. Following are some steps to breathe new life into your staff meeting:

- **Link the agenda with your mission.** Your company's mission statement sets out your key business objectives and strategies. It ought to feed directly into your meeting agenda. For instance, if one of the overarching strategies is to drive increased sales, then list "Sales" as an item on your agenda. Underneath that banner you could list one-on-one sales calls, telemarketing, trade shows and the like. Then discuss each of those individual items. This gives you a yardstick by which to measure progress and to continue to chart your course. The same agenda should flow from week to week.
- **Create synergy.** What is the purpose of bringing your staff together? Most people overlook the primary purpose: to inspire the group to achieve mission-based results faster, higher and better. When the feeling in the group is warm and supportive, it's easier to see that everyone is in it together and the success of the team is linked directly to the success of each individual.
- **Establish rapport.** Effective two-way communication, shared in an environment of trust, is the cornerstone of a great staff meeting. No strategy or management edict — even yours — should go unchallenged, provided the goal is to improve it. Brainstorm new ideas to find ways around potential roadblocks. Encouraging such communication leaves all participants feeling connected and important. The staff should learn from you and you should learn from them.
- **Think outside the box.** Another overlooked objective of effective staff meetings is training. Properly conducted staff meetings are a forum for continuous improvement. Always look for ways to improve performance by carving out time on the agenda to discuss books, articles and even videos aimed at sparking new ideas or improving processes.
- **Hold meetings regularly.** The more frequently meetings are held, the better. In certain situations, daily meetings are appropriate. In others, weekly will do. Let too many days slip by and you risk sending the wrong message to your team. People will never take a meeting seriously if you don't. If meeting schedules are honored more in the breach — that is if you're constantly postponing them, canceling them or calling them at the last minute — that shows a tremendous lack of respect for your team. What could be more important than keeping your team informed, involved and engaged? The ideal time for a staff meeting is Friday afternoon. The workweek is almost done; phone calls and other interruptions dissipate. It's a natural time to put all the actions of that week into perspective. Thus armed, it allows you to set an agenda for the coming week.

Alternately, a Monday morning meeting works well to set the agenda for the week. Choose any other day and you risk losing momentum and effectiveness.

- **Get in and get out.** To achieve its objectives, an effective meeting should last just about an hour. No more or the sense of dread starts to sink in. No less because you won't be able to devote the time to accomplish your objectives. Timeliness is critical to running an effective meeting. Start it on time and end when you say you will. That honors the schedules of other members of the team. To enforce timeliness, put a cookie jar in the middle of the table. Start the meeting on time. Anyone who is late by one minute puts in a dollar. Two minutes late and the charge is two dollars and so on. When the kitty will support a pizza party, throw one. A little bit of fun never hurt anyone.
- **Write up the minutes.** The minutes provide the foundation for the next meeting's agenda. At the beginning of the meeting, make sure someone is assigned to write up what happened and what you're planning to make happen; in other words, who's going to do what by when. This role should rotate from team member to team member (including you) to enhance participation in the meetings and underscore their responsibility to the team.
- **Rotate leadership.** Just as the minute-taker's function should rotate, so too should that of the leader. In fact, the person in charge of the minutes should be in charge of running the next meeting. That provides more accountability and a greater stake in getting the minutes written clearly, concisely and on time.
- **Open the books.** Always provide people a good fundamental understanding of where the business is going. Don't just provide a cursory statement like, "Business is good" or "Profits are down." Go into detail. The better informed your staff, the better decisions they'll make. Avoid the temptation to launch into long diatribes or sermons that are insulting and patronizing to your team members.
- **Avoid the check-in trap.** While sharing what's on everyone's plate is important, don't limit the meeting to that activity. Typically, the boss uses staff meetings as his or her own way of checking in. Am I still on top of my business processes? Are my people still working? Going around the table and updating him or her on what's happening is the management equivalent of asking each individual player on a basketball team at halftime how many points they scored. There's nothing strategic about that. It says nothing about the total picture – whether your team is on task or not. Remember, your staff is your eyes and ears. Make sure your senses are fully attuned.