

Ten Tips for Effective Meetings *Meetings & Expositions, July 1998*

By: *Steve Kaye*

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1. **Avoid meetings whenever possible.** Test the importance of a meeting by asking, "What happens without it?" If your answer is "nothing," then cancel it.
2. **Prepare and write out the goals you wish to accomplish before the meeting.** The goals should always outline the results you want to obtain. They should be clear, complete, and specific enough to allow someone else to lead your meeting if necessary. Also, make sure that the goals are achievable with the people, resources, and time you currently have available.
3. **Challenge each goal.** Ask, "Is there another way to achieve this goal?" For example, if you want to distribute information, you may find it more efficient to telephone, fax, e-mail, or visit. Realize that a meeting is a team activity. Save the tasks that require a team effort for your meetings.
4. **Prepare an agenda.** Everyone knows that an agenda leads to an effective meeting, yet many people choose to "save time" by neglecting to prepare one. A meeting without an agenda is like a journey without a map; it is guaranteed to take longer and produce fewer results.
5. **Inform others.** Send the agenda to participants before the meeting. This helps them prepare so that they are not wasting time preparing for the meeting *during* the meeting.
6. **Assume control.** If you find yourself in a meeting without an agenda, leave. If you must stay, prepare an agenda while you are at the meeting. Collect a list of issues, identify the most important, and work on that. When you finish, if time remains, select the next most important issue.
7. **Focus on the issue(s).** Avoid stories, jokes, and unrelated issues. Although entertaining, these waste time, distract focus, and mislead others. Save the fun for social occasions where it will be appreciated.
8. **Be selective.** Invite only those who can contribute to achieving your goals to the meeting. Crowds of observers and supporters bog down the process.

9. **Budget time.** No one would spend \$1,000 on a 10-cent pencil, but they often spend 40 employee-hours on trivia. Budget time in proportion to the value of the issue. For example, you could say, "I want a decision on this in 10 minutes. That means we'll evaluate it for the next 9 minutes, followed by a vote."
10. **Use structured activities in your meetings.** These process tools keep you in control while you ensure equitable participation and systematic progress toward results.

Steve Kaye helps leaders hold effective meetings. He is an IAF Certified Professional Facilitator, author, and speaker. His meeting facilitation and leadership workshops create success for everyone. Call 714-528-1300 for details. Visit <http://www.stevkaye.com> for a free report.