

Take control of your meetings

Everyone who has ever worked in an office knows how tedious badly-run meetings can be. They can leave attendees frustrated, bored and even lower morale in the office.

The consequences of an ineffective meeting can be bad mouthing of the facilitator, dismissive talk about the organisation/club and an attitude that meetings are useless.

Think of the time spent in the meeting and the loss of energy if nothing is resolved. Also consider the consequences of confusion over what has or has not been decided.

The golden rule of meetings is they must have an agenda.. The danger of no agenda is things get sidetracked - that's especially in meetings about the 'airy fairy' stuff.

The facilitator needs to decide how long the meeting will be, what topics will be discussed and ask other attendees before hand what they would like to bring up.

Being a good facilitator is difficult. Being able to take a good meeting is an important skill.

Good facilitators are those who:

- * Insist on a formal agenda and clear objectives.
- * Prepare in advance.
- * Take control of meetings where there is a need.
- * Finish the meeting when outcomes are achieved, with no reference to the allotted time.
- * Have free time to meet quickly on urgent issues.
- * Don't allow personal agendas to derail the outcome.
- * Are on time for meetings.
- * Don't have to leave before the appointed finish time.
- * Devote all their attention to a meeting.

You need to manage people - to be able to handle the loud mouth and the clown and to encourage the shy person to contribute. You need to be careful that one person doesn't take over or sabotage the meeting. You need to get the group back on track if things are sidetracked.

A meeting is about keeping everyone feeling "safe" to participate. The facilitator also needs to be able to work with any conflict that arises, and not to get bogged down. Sometimes you need to take an issue off line and deal with it separately. For example, a conflict between two people can't be dealt with at a meeting. The facilitator may have an answer, but he or she can't be wedded to it.

Acknowledgement of people's contribution to a meeting is important too. New Zealanders often don't give enough credit. Encouragement and a sense of humour always helps.

At the end of a meeting, always sum up what's been decided. Sometimes you need to go with the consensus of the majority - not everyone has to agree, but all need to go along with the final decisions.

Other things that need to be considered are: who takes the minutes and how they are presented and/or circulated to attendees.

Some basic rules of meetings

- * Circulate an agenda for all meetings
- * Stipulate objectives, in order of priority, and address them in that order.
- * Cancel meetings if there is no urgent need to meet – volunteer's time is precious.