

# Creating a Culture of Effective Meetings

---

## Eliminate behavior that leads to ineffective meetings and get more done in the meetings you do have.

By Mike Kolker

---

### Today's Environment

Meetings are an essential part of business life—11 million of them are held each day in the US, according to a study by the University of Arizona. But only slightly more than half of those are productive, the National Statistics Council says—so it makes sense that *Industry Week* calls meetings “The Great White Collar Crime,” wasting \$37 billion each year.

Bad meetings can take down your bottom line by squandering your company's time and money. Want proof? You don't have to go far to get it—next time you're stuck in an unproductive meeting, calculate the salaries and benefits of your colleagues at the table. An hour-long meeting of eight colleagues easily costs the company thousands of dollars—not including opportunity cost, productivity loss or failing morale.

It's no surprise that meetings can be a drain on a company's resources—too often, meetings lack a clear goal or agenda, or the right people aren't in the room. Or another team is tackling the same issue at the same time—unbeknownst to both teams. Meeting participants are multi-tasking instead of focusing.

And when a meeting *does* go right, no one follows up.

### Point B's Perspective

We may be doing more with less these days, but that increases the need for effective collaboration, rather than decreasing it. Meetings aren't going away.

So we recommend building a culture of effective meetings, in which teams use meetings to make decisions, assign clear actions for follow-up, and build cross-organizational relationships. Train your organization to be more effective and organized, and the meetings you *do* have will be worth the time and energy of having them. To help you build a more effective meeting culture, we've compiled some best practices to follow below.

#### Assign an Owner

The meeting owner is accountable for scheduling the meeting, setting the agenda, facilitating the discussion and capturing decisions and action items that the group agrees on. The most important word in the sentence above? *Accountable*.

#### Set a Clear Goal

By clearly stating the goal for the meeting in the invitation—as well as having a time-boxed agenda and assigning pre-work as necessary—the meeting can proceed without confusion about what's being discussed or who should attend.

---

## Creating a Culture of Effective Meetings

---

### **Get the Right People in the Room**

Before holding a meeting, the meeting owner must make sure the right people are invited—otherwise, you risk wasting time and causing churn.

### **Keep the Discussion on Track**

When the conversation goes off-topic, the meeting owner can table the topic and assign someone to follow up after the meeting—a tactic called a *parking lot*. That way, the points themselves are captured without derailing the meeting.

### **Follow Up**

One of the best tools a meeting owner has is the follow-up email. Meeting notes should include any decisions that are made, all action items that the group agreed on, and assign ownership for those action items. This eliminates the possibility that tasks or decisions made will be forgotten or misunderstood. Pro tip: Use a laptop and projector to record comments and decisions, outline ideas, and generate on-the-fly meeting minutes that you can send as soon as the meeting is over.

### **Consider 30- or 45-Minute Meetings**

If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it. The same applies to meetings—a strict time limit is a forcing function to get more done in less time. With a clear goal, an actionable agenda, and the right attendees, you might be surprised at what you can get done in half an hour.

### **Drive Honest Feedback**

In the last few minutes of the meeting, ask participants what went well and what could be better going forward. Not only does this help improve meetings, but it builds a culture of honesty and directness.

### **Promote the Mindset that Real Work Happens in Meetings**

Help your employees see that meetings are where work happens, not a time in the day where they are pulled from their “real” work. In a productive, well-run meeting,

teams collaborate, ideas get vetted, and decisions are made. That *is* work.

### **Communicate Your Goal—and Their Accountability**

Tell your team, from the highest level possible, what you’re trying to accomplish. Institute training and/or a code of conduct to tell them what’s expected and why—and expect them to rise to the challenge. If they don’t, hold them accountable.

### **Start Small**

Select a project or team to pilot these suggested changes for 30-60 days. Gather their feedback, fine-tune your approach, and have leaders from that group roll out the changes.

## **The Bottom Line**

Culture change takes time—but Point B can help. We can train your organization to run an effective meeting, even with strong personalities in the room. To boost your organization’s efficiency and bring more value to your team’s work day, contact us about our Organizational Effectiveness strategies.