

## What's Happening in Your Staff Meetings?

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“Oh great, here we go again!” “Another staff meeting!” “Didn’t we just have one?” “What a waste of time.”

Do these words reflect your thoughts when you hear there is another staff meeting coming up? Ask many teachers or staff members this question and you will receive all kinds of emotional responses from indifference to contempt. Staff meetings are great to get together and socialize! Most people perceive staff meetings as an expectation to be tolerated. We only have staff meetings because...um....well, because!



The good news is that staff meetings can be better, useful and profitable. Last year I received a book titled *Leading Effective Meetings, Teams, and Work Groups in Districts and Schools* by Matthew Jennings. One of the topics covered is conducting effective staff meetings. Following are some suggestions for more effective and efficient staff meetings.

When you plan a staff meeting, plan it like you would your classroom—set it up for success. Plan each meeting carefully like you would carefully plan each lesson in your classroom.

- Communicate the purpose of each meeting.
- Collaborate with staff on developing norms for expected behavior.
- Create staff “base teams.”

Seems like simple things to accomplish . . . yeah, right! It takes time, intentionality, and careful planning to make successful staff meetings happen.

1. Communicate the purpose of your meeting
  - a. To build relationships among staff
  - b. To focus on professional development
  - c. To solve problems and make decisions
2. Collaborate with staff on developing norms for expected behavior.
  - a. Facilitate a discussion of group norms
  - b. Discuss the messages that the behaviors list
  - c. Discuss the value of having a set of basic agreements for meetings such as “we will start and end on time”
  - d. Give value to each agreement and work with the top three choices
3. Create “base teams”
  - a. Involve all staff members
  - b. Personalize meetings
  - c. Provide a schoolwide focus to meetings
  - d. Provide peer support and celebration of successes

- e. Increase the likelihood that all staff members will actively contribute to the meetings

So how do we handle quality control? Do your meetings have a facilitator whose role is to lead the meeting and promote the participation of each member? How about a recorder to write down details or even a timekeeper to watch the clock and warn fellow members when the designated time for each agenda item is over.

An Agenda, you ask? Yes, an Agenda! Do your staff meetings have agendas sent out at least 24 hours before the meeting time? An agenda helps discern the meeting's purpose. When teachers help shape the agenda, they gain an increased sense of ownership for the meeting.

Let's take a quick look at the physical setting of a staff meeting.

Seating arrangements must be matched to the types of activities that will occur at the meeting. A U-shaped or semicircle is best for groups of 12-22 staff members, and is well suited to large-group discussion. A single square or round is best for groups of 8-12 members, and is well suited for problem solving. A v-shaped arrangement with tables of four to five participants apiece is best for groups of 16-40 and is well suited for small group work at each table. A traditional arrangement of front-facing rows is appropriate for any size group and is well suited for the imparting of information by the facilitator.

Though often overlooked, setting an appropriate room temperature is essential for a comfortable meeting environment. The optimal temperature is between 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit. Make adjustments as necessary.

Bright indirect natural lighting is best; whenever possible keep the blinds open to take advantage of the sun.

People respond well to appropriate music. Not only does it connect with them emotionally, but it also helps break their normal thought patterns. Music within the range of 68-80 beats per minute is best for setting a positive mood.

Aromas can powerfully influence the mood of a meeting. If real estate agents are convinced that the smell of freshly baked bread can sway potential home buyers, then perhaps the smell of freshly baked cookies can positively influence meeting attendees!

Color affects everyone. Different colors are associated with different emotions. Hang colorful visuals and peripherals in the room to subtly enhance the mood of the room and encourage the use of colored markers or pencils for completing activities.

Refreshments can provide attendees with a physical and psychological boost. Food and drink can also facilitate community building and encouraging socialization among participants. Snacks that are high in sugar (fruit and candy) are acceptable for meetings

less than 30 minutes; meetings lasting more than 30 minutes should include foods that are high in protein (yogurt) or complex carbohydrates (nuts, whole grain breads).

These are a few ideas to get you started in having more successful and efficient staff meetings. Have fun implementing the ideas and experiencing the positive results because of your efforts.