

# WHY MEETINGS FAIL...AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

<p><b>No pre-planning or not enough pre-planning.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not clear what the goals are or who decides.</li> <li>• Not the right meeting with the right people at the right time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid facilitators spend twice as much time preparing for a meeting as the length of the meeting itself. You don't have to put in that much time but how much time are you spending?</li> <li>• Every meeting should have an agenda.</li> <li>• An agenda isn't an agenda unless it has a start and end time, and estimated time allotment for each topic.</li> <li>• Almost every meeting topic falls into one of three goals: give information, get input, make a decision. Make sure you know what your goal is for each topic.</li> <li>• Decide who decides. If you need a decision made, how will it be made? By an individual – at the meeting or after the meeting? Vote of the group? Consensus of the group?</li> <li>• Consider listing a guiding question as the agenda topic: What input do we have before the principal makes a decision about the new computer lab? Which fundraisers do we want to hold this year?</li> <li>• Give thought to who needs to be at the meeting to accomplish your goals. When does the meeting need to take place relative to other related events or decisions?</li> <li>• If it's a regular meeting, survey the people who you want to attend, not only those who do come, for a meeting time. <a href="http://www.doodle.com">www.doodle.com</a> + paper</li> <li>• Consider alternating times of day for meetings to allow different people to participate more easily.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ignoring reality that different people come to meetings for different reasons.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially in a school setting, different people come to meetings for different reasons: parent who is usually home with kids all day and wants social interaction, teacher or administrator who is in the middle or end of a long work day, employed parent who has limited time to participate at school.</li> <li>• Build in social time AND otherwise stick to your agenda and timeframes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>People in the meeting haven't developed good meeting conversation skills.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a few key strategies for handling challenging meeting situations. (See next page)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of follow-up.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always end a meeting by restating agreements/decisions and tasks and who is assigned to them.</li> <li>• Before the meeting starts, assign someone the role of recorder/secretary and responsibility for distributing notes/minutes from the meeting both by email and make hard copy available.</li> <li>• At the next meeting, review the previous meeting notes to check on follow up.</li> </ul>

# Dealing with Challenging Situations at Meetings

<p>The person who is monopolizing the conversation or who is going on and not making their point.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often this has to do with a person not feeling heard. Try paraphrasing what the person is saying, “So I hear you saying that....” to see if that helps them feel heard and move on.</li> <li>• If you can’t tell what their point is, ask “X, can you help me understand how this connects to [our topic/goal]?”</li> <li>• If there is a pause – or a breath –or even if you have to interrupt with an ‘excuse me’ - “Thanks for that X, let’s take a moment and hear from some others in the group as well.”</li> <li>• Still a problem? Combine the two, paraphrase what the person is saying and then ask a question of the rest of the group to transition. “So I understand that you...., so what does everyone else think?”</li> </ul>
<p>The person who is sitting in the back and isn’t participating.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the group is small enough, consider going around the room to give everyone a chance to contribute or pass.</li> <li>• Say, “Let’s pause for a moment and hear from some people we haven’t heard from yet. X or Y, do you have anything you’d like to contribute?”</li> </ul>
<p>The person who is focused on their own personal situation – It’s all about me.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make them feel heard by paraphrasing what they are saying and if you can, connecting it to your topic/or goal. “So it sounds like you were frustrated with a lack of communication about the last teacher changes. Our principal is here to give us information today, but sounds like you would suggest more communication this time around.”</li> <li>• Suggest taking the issue offline after the meeting or another time. “I can hear your frustration (or excitement, or whatever). I don’t think we have the time (right people, whatever) to address this in depth right now. How about you take this issue offline with X after the meeting?”</li> </ul>
<p>The person who brings up topics that are off the agenda topic or off goal. (Example, trying to make the group decide when the goal is to give input.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If someone is bringing up new ideas or concerns or questions, create a Parking Lot on a whiteboard or piece of chart paper. “Thanks X, let’s put that idea in the Parking Lot so we don’t lose it and can consider putting it on the next meeting agenda.” This helps people feel heard and captures topics that need to be addressed in the future.</li> <li>• For someone who persists, you may need to use peer pressure. “Thanks X, now we really need to get back to our agenda topic now in order to respect everyone else’s time.”</li> </ul>