

Enhance Your Career Success with Savvy Meeting Skills

by Mike Mitchell

We have all attended meetings at work, in professional or social associations, or as part of religious organizations. Some are productive and some...well, not so much. Whether you are a participant or the leader, you can enhance your career success by developing a few savvy skills to make your meetings more effective and productive.

You...as a Participant

Michael Doyle and David Strauss write in their book, How to Make Meetings Work, "Surely you have been in enough meetings to recognize that there are effective and ineffective group members. Being an effective group member takes knowledge and skill." Here are five tips to help you improve your skills, contribute to your meetings, and enhance your career success.

- **Know your subject** - Research the options before your meeting; and have one or two definite ideas or solutions to offer the group. This increases your credibility.
- **Arrive five minutes early** - Greet, or introduce yourself to, the other participants and indulge in friendly small talk; select your preferred position at the table or in the room. This shows that you have a good sense of time management and builds your networking contacts.
- **Listen for understanding** - Actively listen to other members; notice when someone makes a point that supports or opposes your ideas; be courteous and don't interrupt; show your interest with your body language. Your respect for others and interest in their ideas will be noticed and appreciated.
- **Present your idea in 30 seconds or less** - Gather your thoughts before addressing the group; have your arguments well prepared; even if your presentation takes longer, make your main point in 30 seconds; anticipate questions. Everyone will appreciate your concise well-thought out contribution to the discussion.
- **Stay a few minutes after the meeting** - Express your appreciation to the other members on their ideas (if appropriate); re-enforce your contacts with new members; thank the leader. This is another opportunity to network and build rapport.

By developing savvy meeting skills, you'll gain the respect of the other attendees, have others listen to your ideas, increase your networking contacts, and add credibility to your career.

You... as the Leader

As the leader of a meeting, you should have already mastered the five skills of the participants listed above. In addition, there are more meeting skills required of the leader. In their excellent book Communicating at Work, Drs. Alessandra and Hunsaker have identified the following ten guidelines for conducting an effective meeting.

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- Need - Only hold meetings when there is a definite need. Think about other means of gathering or exchanging information. Would an email be sufficient for that purpose?
- Purpose - Define your objectives and expectations for your meeting. Notify the participants of your expectations before convening your meeting.
- Attendees - Invite only those people who can contribute or need to be involved.
- Agenda - This helps the leader and participants stay focused. You should distribute an agenda to all invitees before the meeting and again at the beginning of the meeting.
- Meeting Room - Choose a room conducive to having a good meeting. It should be free from distractions and have the necessary equipment for any presentations.
- Start and End on Time - Respect the time of others. They have entrusted time from their daily schedule to you. You are responsible for their productivity during your meeting.
- Stick to the Agenda - Encourage discussion but focus on your desired outcome.
- Encourage Participation - If someone doesn't participate or contribute to the discussion, don't invite that person to your next meeting.
- Balanced Discussion - Allow alternative suggestions and opinions but stay focused on your objective and in control of the discussion.
- Summarize the Meeting - Before dismissing the meeting, summarize the discussion, including specific action items and the person responsible for each. After your meeting, you should follow-up with an email or memo to each participant. Send everyone an "official" written copy of the outcome and accomplishments of your meeting.

By using savvy meeting skills, you will develop a reputation as an effective leader. Your value to the organization increases, and your network will expand. You will enhance your career success.

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