

Three Ways to Keep Meetings Short

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**1. Set a Specific and Detailed Agenda**

Often meetings are set with only a general topic in hopes that the conversation will take care of itself. This leads to open discussion that can run on forever.

* Before a meeting, create a one-page agenda with simple bullet points of the items to be discussed. The best practice is to create a meeting-agenda template for the company or department. This way, anyone scheduling a meeting can create the agenda in a quick and uniform manner.
* At the beginning of the meeting, the agenda should be quickly discussed and approved. People should be a bit flexible in modifying the agenda, as the needs of the group outweigh the need for strict adherence to the original agenda.
* Establish time limits for each discussion. You'll be surprised that the discussion almost always fits the time frame, simply because people will tailor their conversation to fit the time allowed.
* Give a warning when you are a minute or two from the prescribed end.

**2. Invite Only the People You Really Need**

When you think about it, a meeting with six executives could be costing the company hundreds of dollars per hour. If only two people are having most of the conversation, most of that money is going straight down the toilet. Additionally, the people not involved in the conversation feel frustrated and angry that their time is being wasted.

* When you build your agenda for the meeting, list only the people absolutely required for each of the agenda items.
* If not everyone is required for all the agenda items, schedule the discussions so they start with the most people and allow people to leave as their names drop off the list. That way they'll be motivated to keep their own conversations short and to the point so they can get back to work.

**3. Create a Structured Close**

I was talking with a consultant friend who schedules her one-hour meetings for 50 minutes. This is common among therapists, who need 10 minutes to prepare before meeting their next patient. I asked her why, and she told me that often her clients drag out the end of the meeting a bit. I suggested to her that the best way to solve that problem was the use of a closing process. At the designated 50-minute mark of every meeting, use the same three questions to end the meeting**.**

* In one sentence, what was your single biggest takeaway from this meeting?
* In one sentence, what is one topic that should be discussed in our next meeting?
* Give one word or phrase describing how you feel about this meeting?

By establishing this closing structure, she has set expectations in her client's mind for closure of the meeting, and wrap up is simple. In a group setting, whoever is in charge of the meeting can direct the same process around the table and take notes for future agenda items. People who leave earlier can take two minutes and share before they leave.