



"We find the BEST and SCREEN out the rest!"



The 10 Worst Things to do In a Meeting

Meetings are often hailed as the No. 1 time-waster in corporate America, and -- unless food is served to offset the boredom -- the most torturous part of the work day.

Who among us hasn't cringed as the office windbag launched into a self-aggrandizing discourse that was completely off-point, pitied a meek co-worker who got trounced by the office bully, or marveled at a colleague's ability to string together an array of buzzwords that mean absolutely nothing?

Yet no matter how mind-numbing things get, don't be lulled into thinking that meetings aren't important. The fact is, they can make -- or break -- your career. Here are 10 things you should never do in a meeting:

1. **Show Up Late.** Nothing says "I'm disorganized" like walking into a meeting already in progress. Arriving a few minutes early not only demonstrates that you respect your colleagues' time, but guarantees you get a good seat as well.
2. **Be Unprepared.** If you've been given an agenda or materials beforehand, read them. Think of any questions you have or contributions you could make to the subjects being discussed.
3. **Monopolize the Conversation.** When discussion ensues, it's protocol to let more senior figures contribute first. Once they've said their piece, concisely make your points. Don't drone on -- or feel compelled to speak at all if you don't have anything purposeful to say. As the old adage goes, "Better to be thought a fool, than speak and remove all doubt."
4. **Make Your Statements Sound Like Questions.** Phrasing your statements as questions invites others to say no, argue or take credit for your ideas. Speak in declarative sentences, such as, "Let's do more research on that."
5. **Misread Signals.** Try to gauge the needs and mood of those in the room. Listen carefully to what people are saying to discern how receptive they might be to your ideas. You need to make your message relevant to your audience. For example, if everyone is focused on cutting costs and you're angling for a system upgrade, you'll either want to stress how the new software will save money -- or table your request for another day.
6. **Get Intimidated.** Unfortunately, some of your co-workers may view meetings as a battleground and themselves as verbal gladiators, sparring for the boss' favor. If you become the victim of a put-down or accusation, calmly defend yourself. If you need to buy time to think, do so with a question that will make your attacker accountable. For example: "Andrew, when did you start thinking I don't care about our sales results?"
7. **Chew Gum.** The smacking, popping, cracking and cow-like chewing are annoying. Plus, it's rude and unprofessional. 'Nuff said.
8. **Keep Your Cell Phone On.** You turn it off in restaurants and at the movies. Turn it off for your meeting. A ringing phone interrupts the presenter and distracts the audience. And whatever you do, never take a call in the middle of a meeting.
9. **Wander Off Topic.** Don't hijack the agenda. Stay focused on what you and your team are trying to accomplish. If you must digress into unrelated areas, make sure it's all right with the others present. A good way to handle important issues not related to the topic at hand is to record them on a flip-chart and revisit them at an appropriate time.
10. **Skip It.** Sure, you might get more done if you forgo a meeting to stay at your desk and do your actual work. But if the meeting was called by someone higher up in the organization, you'll miss an opportunity to make yourself known. Remember, in the end, meetings aren't just about productivity, they're also about projecting a positive image and building professional relationships.

Just For Laughs



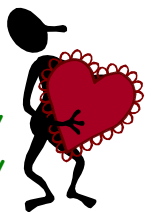
DATES TO REMEMBER

January

- 1—New Years Day
- 15—Martin Luther King's B'Day

February

- 2—Groundhog Day
- 14—Valentine's Day
- 19—Presidents' Day
- 21—Ash Wednesday



March

- 11—Daylight Savings Time
- 17—St. Patrick's Day
- 20—First Day of Spring

Recent research shows that half of hiring managers take a certain qualification into account when making hiring and promotion decisions. What is it? Experience? Technical aptitude? Business acumen? Actually, the mystery attribute is writing ability. This statistic from a survey conducted by the National Commission on Writing affirms that no matter your field or position, your ability to communicate using the written word plays a major role in career success.

Consider these additional findings:

- In a survey of executives, more than one-third cited typos and grammatical mistakes as the most common résumé errors.
- Strong writing skills are even more important for higher-level positions: In a poll by The Wall Street Journal and Harris Interactive, the top complaint about MBA students among recruiters was inferior communication skills.
- In a separate survey, 71 percent of executives said they use e-mail as their primary mode of interaction, underscoring that more people are communicating via the keyboard than ever before.

Don't fret, though, if your writing skills could use a refresh. The following tips can help you improve:

Know what you want to say

Before sitting down to write, make sure you know what you want to convey. It seems like an obvious step, but many people rush headlong into a document and discover halfway through that they've barely touched upon the topic they set out to discuss.

Formulate a one-sentence statement that describes the purpose of your piece and jot it down. For example, your goal may be to "suggest a new system for generating monthly reports" or "convince a client that our product is the best in the market." Refer back to this statement as you write, and use it as a way to remain focused on your message.

Keep it simple.

A common problem among business documents is that they are difficult to decipher. That's because the writers are so concerned with sounding sophisticated that their points get lost among convoluted sentences, unnecessary words and confusing phrases.

Consider the following sentence: "In order to ascertain the appropriate course of action regarding the company's proposed initiative concerning an expansion of current operations into the Asian market, committee members debated the various merits and drawbacks." It may sound lofty to the untrained ear, but most readers won't have the time or patience to make sense of this statement. A better sentence would read: "Committee members met to discuss the company's Asian expansion."

To be clear and concise, keep these tips in mind:

- Cut unnecessary words and phrases. That means changing statements such as "it would appear that" to "apparently" and "in addition to" to "also."
- Use short sentences and paragraphs. Long blocks of copy can be intimidating and seem inaccessible to readers.
- Include bullets, like the ones used here, to call attention to certain details. It's easy for readers to scan lists and get immediate value.

Identify your reader.

Many documents also suffer from an overflow of jargon and technical speak. When composing a memo, report or presentation, customize it to your audience. If you're a member of the finance department, for example, you would want to define accounting and finance terminology in your reports and explain accounting-specific concepts in simple terms. Remember, what's clear to you isn't necessarily clear to your readers.

It's also wise to anticipate the types of questions your readers may have about the information you present. If you propose that the company use a new vendor, for example, executives will want to know the cost savings or customer service benefits and challenges associated with switching the account.

Trust your ear.

The true test of any written document is how it sounds. So, before distributing your work, read it aloud. Chances are you'll have an innate ability to recognize words and phrases that sound awkward or forced. For important pieces, such as those that will be sent to senior managers or executives, go one step further and have a colleague review the document to check for typos, grammatical errors and other mistakes.

You may think that success in your current position depends very little on your ability to write well. Think again. The National Commission on Writing notes that two-thirds of salaried employees in large American companies have some writing responsibility. That includes everyone from administrative assistants who draft departmental memos to sales professionals who prepare client presentations. So, next time you write, take steps to ensure the documents you produce would make your high school English teacher proud.

Contents Courtesy of Robert Half International

Squash Your Fear of Public Speaking & Speaking Up

It is said that public speaking is the thing people fear the most, yet sooner or later most people will have to speak in front of a group at work. Whether training new employees, giving a presentation to management or even conducting an interview, being an effective speaker can help you get ahead at work.

Consider this: At the end of a particular university course on public speaking, each student gives a speech and is evaluated by classmates. Some students do a lot of research for their speeches, while others focus less on the research and more on their delivery. Over the years the audiences have been consistent in their evaluations.

So, who do you think rates higher?

- A. A speaker with fabulous information and so-so delivery
- B. A speaker with fabulous delivery and so-so information

The answer is "B." Of course, the ideal situation is to have both fabulous information and fabulous delivery but, for many audiences, delivery is the most critical factor. Poor delivery can make the most interesting topic sound boring, while excellent delivery can make even a dull topic come alive.

Here are four traits of successful speakers, followed by a number of ways you can develop these traits.

Confidence:

Good speakers may sometimes feel nervous, but they try not to let it show. Speakers look and sound more confident when they make eye contact with the audience, move naturally, use audiovisual equipment effectively and speak fluidly (avoiding too many "uhs" and "ums").

Credibility:

This is an audience's perception of how believable a speaker is. To be credible, a speaker must be seen as someone who is knowledgeable about the topic. However, this does not mean someone who is a "know-it-all."

Enthusiasm:

Magnetic speakers are enthusiastic about their topic, and they share that fervor with their audience through variety and energy in their voice, gestures, and body movements. Other terms that can be applied to these speakers are "high energy" and "passionate."

Ease:

Natural speakers don't lecture, they are at ease. Even when speaking in front of an audience of hundreds, they speak as if they were having a conversation with a group of friends. Other terms that may be applied to these speakers are "real" or "down-to-earth."

Ways to Improve Your Skills

- As with any skill, one of the best ways to improve is by just doing it. With speaking, this means getting yourself in front of as many audiences as possible.
- When there are opportunities for informal speaking at work -- such as introducing a new employee, volunteer for the job.
- If you're presenting a training program at work, make sure you ask audience members to give you feedback by filling out an evaluation form.
- When possible, consider taping yourself practicing or giving presentations.
- You can then see or hear for yourself the areas where you may need to improve.

There are a variety of seminars and classes that can help you improve your speaking skills. Check out continuing education programs offered by post-secondary institutions and consider courses offered by the private sector.

Contents Courtesy of Tag and Catherine Goulet



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