

Oh no, not another meeting

Meetings are something that most people try hard to avoid. Sure, meetings can be boring, time-consuming, even unnecessary. But if you stick to a few simple principles, your next meeting could be a much pleasanter and productive experience.

Wer verdreht nicht die Augen, wenn er das Wort Besprechung nur hört? Sind die meisten davon doch unproduktiv, langweilig und ermüdend. Das muss nicht sein. Hier ein paar Tipps, wie Sie es besser machen können.

According to one *poll*, most managers believe that up to 50% of their meetings are unproductive and that up to 25% of meetings are spent discussing irrelevant *issues*. *Common complaints* are that meetings are too long, participants arrive unprepared, or are not given enough time to prepare, and no clear result is achieved.

However, the average middle-to-senior manager may spend as much as 40% of the working day in meetings. This is very costly for the company.

There are *salaries* to be paid plus the expense of sending out memos and faxes, transportation costs, meals and refreshments but just as important, other duties are neglected while the attendees are talking, listening and often wasting time.

If a meeting is to take place, it should be both necessary and productive. Here are some tips to make your meetings more effective, no matter whether you are leading the meeting or participating in it.

Know why you are meeting

Ask yourself what you want to *accomplish* at the meeting. You should always have a clear objective and make sure you, and everyone at the meeting, are clear as to why you are getting together.

Be prepared

Do your homework before the meeting and take along all necessary documents.

Have an agenda

Each item should be clearly stated so that participants know what is to be discussed and what input may be expected from them. Early distribution of the agenda gives them time to prepare properly.

Invite the right people

Meetings tend to become less productive as the number of attendees increases, so be

selective about who you invite. Ask yourself if it is really necessary for everyone to be there the whole time. If not, order the items on the agenda so that it is possible for some participants to leave without staying for the whole meeting.

Timing

Be punctual. If a meeting is planned to start of 9 a.m., start at 9 *sharp*. Some people have a bad habit of arriving late and making those who arrive on time wait. When people know that your meetings always start *promptly*, they will do their best to arrive on time.

Have a *deadline*. Meetings should not only begin on time but end on time, too. Limiting the time of both the meeting and individual items on the agenda can create a sense of *urgency* and often results in the participants being more focused and concentrating on the issues *at hand*. *Allocating* the time for each item can help prevent a five-minute information item from becoming a 30-minute discussion topic.

Keep to the agenda

Meetings are more effective when a *chairperson* or *facilitator* controls the direction of the meeting and keeps everyone focused on the agenda. Even the best-intentioned participants may start *digressing* from the topic under discussion and an effective *chair* will politely stop such digressions quickly.

Keep a record and have an action plan

There should always be someone who *takes the minutes* of a meeting. Having a non-participant do this task is best as it is very hard to record and participate. If that is not *feasible*, it may be possible to change the minute-taker during the meeting.

To avoid having people leave the same meeting with different views of what is supposed to happen next, *assign* tasks that lead to specific actions.



For the non-native English speaker, attending or leading a meeting where the language spoken is English presents even more potential *pitfalls*. It is important that you are not only prepared for the meeting, i.e. with the necessary information, but that you also prepare yourself with the language that will be used. Write notes on what you want to say and look up *key* words or phrases and practise saying them before the meeting. Becoming familiar with phrases that signal what it is you are going to say can help with the flow of your language and get people listening. For example, giving an opinion (“From my point of view”), interrupting (“If I could just come in here”), finishing what you are going to say (“If I could just finish”) or disagreeing (“I’m not sure I’d agree with you on that”). Remember, spoken English is not usually as direct as German. “You’re wrong” or “I disagree” can sound impolite and give the wrong impression and English people will often soften a disagreement by saying something positive first, “You may be right, but . . .”. This is very important to remember and not just for when you want to disagree. German managers sometime complain that it is difficult doing business with the English because they leave a meeting believing they have agreed on something only later to find out the English think otherwise. Maybe the problem was not hearing the all important word “but” and not listening carefully to what followed it.

So was it a good meeting? A major *prejudice* many have towards meetings is that they are not seen as being real work. “OK, the meeting is over, let’s get back to work” is an attitude many have. If you follow the basic rules – set a clear agenda, have clear objectives and realistic outcomes – you will go a long way towards *getting rid* of this prejudice. ■

<i>accomplish, to</i>	erreichen
<i>agenda</i>	Tagesordnung
<i>allocate, to</i>	bestimmen, bereitstellen
<i>assign, to</i>	zuteilen
<i>at hand</i>	anstehend, vorliegend
<i>chair</i>	Moderator
<i>chairperson</i>	Moderator, Vorsitzende/r
<i>common</i>	üblich
<i>complaint</i>	Beschwerde
<i>deadline</i>	Zeitrahmen
<i>digress, to</i>	abschweifen
<i>facilitator</i>	Moderator
<i>feasible</i>	machbar
<i>get rid of, to</i>	loswerden
<i>issues</i>	Themen, Fragen
<i>keep to, to</i>	bei etwas bleiben
<i>key</i>	wichtig
<i>pitfall</i>	Gefahr, Falle
<i>poll</i>	Umfrage
<i>prejudice</i>	Vorurteil
<i>promptly</i>	unverzüglich, pünktlich
<i>salary</i>	Gehalt
<i>sharp</i>	um Punkt (9 Uhr)
<i>take the minutes, to</i>	Protokoll führen
<i>urgency</i>	Dringlichkeit

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