

Mining Group Gold: A Cooperative Approach to Meeting Effectiveness

By Trenton Hightower

No chairs.

A 60-minute time clock.

Frustration with rambling, unfocused meetings has caused some otherwise rational managers to resort to extreme measures like these. I'd like to propose, however, that there are more moderate ways to maximize your team's meeting effectiveness. In fact, it's hard to find a better model for an effective meeting than Tom Kayser has already developed in his great book, *Mining Group Gold: How to Cash in on the Collaborative Brain Power of a Group*.

Kayser suggests we all start every meeting with a clear statement of its purpose. Why are we gathered here today? Do we intend simply to share information, or are there some decisions to be made? Understanding the goal of a meeting is the first step to keeping everyone focused, and standardizing their expectations for the session. Take the time to make sure everyone understands the purpose of the meeting. Answer the question "What are we here today to do?" That step alone will make the meeting more effective by keeping the group on task. Meeting participants will leave the session more often with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Always take time to prepare a formal agenda. Keeping to this structure assures a thorough, effective treatment of all the issues that demand our attention.

Tom Kayser has also identified five important roles for every meeting:

- **Primary Facilitator**
Focusing on group dynamics, this person monitors the ebb and flow among participants. When productivity-robbing activities occur, the primary facilitator intervenes. Does someone need to be drawn in? This person has the crucial role of re-focusing the group on the original goal and objective
- **Secondary Facilitator**
Because everyone is responsible for creating a productive group session, every participant plays the role of secondary facilitator. Pointing out when consensus has been reached by conversation is dragging on. Re-focusing on the original outcome. Stepping in to re-direct discussion that goes off on a tangent.
- **Timekeeper**
This person monitors how long the group is taking to accomplish its tasks. According to Kayser, a good timekeeper will let the group know when half their allotted time has passed, so they can pick up the pace. Another time check can occur when 75 percent of the time has elapsed. The facilitator decides at this point how best to achieve the meeting's goal: to continue working on the current topic or table it for future discussion and move on to items that can be resolved in the time remaining. A 5-minute warning allows for efficient final wrap-up, questions and a decision on the next meeting date and time if necessary.
- **Minute Taker**

All decisions made and items needing action with responsible parties assigned are recorded by the Minute Taker. What is the timetable for completion of these action items? Confirm all this information during the last 5 minutes of the meeting. All participants should receive meeting Minutes within 48 hours.

- **Scribe**

Separate from the Minute Taker and not always necessary, a scribe keeps track of what is being said on flip charts during the meeting. When a page is complete, it is taped to the wall for future reference.

Zero in on your purpose. Decide on your desired outcomes. Prepare an agenda. Assign key roles for participants. Plan your next meeting with these 4 things in mind, and watch its effectiveness improve.

You can even bring the chairs back in.