

Do's and Don'ts of Effective Meetings

- ✚ **Don't** have a meeting: If the information can be covered by an e-mail, or a brief report—don't have a meeting. Differentiate between the "need" for one-way information dissemination and two-way information sharing. Always ask *"Is this meeting the best way to handle this?"*
- ✚ **Do** jot down your objectives for the meeting: Finish the following sentence, *"By the end of the meeting, I want the group to..."* The more concrete your meeting objectives, the more focused your agenda will be. To evaluate the meeting, ask yourself *"Was I successful in meeting the objective?"*
- ✚ **Don't** invite people who do not need to attend -- they are busy. Limit attendance to subject matter experts and decision makers – no observers. A good rule of thumb is to go over your list of attendees twice before inviting more than 8 people. The fewer the better.
- ✚ **Do** communicate the purpose of the meeting. This will keep the meeting on track. You do not have to pass out a written agenda, but tell attendees the purpose of the meeting and the topics that will be covered first thing. Arrange the topics from most important to least important just in case you do not get through them all.
- ✚ **Do** try very, very hard to keep the meeting to no more than an hour. If you cannot, consider scheduling a second meeting so you cover the subject in two shorter meetings instead of one very long one.
- ✚ **Do** tell participants to come prepared.
- ✚ **Do** start the meeting on time and end on time. Ask for help keeping the meeting on time and on track. It's okay to park a topic for discussion in a follow-up meeting.
- ✚ **Don't** close the meeting without a clear statement of what happens next. Next steps should tell attendees what, who and when.
- ✚ **Do** be polite and courteous.
- ✚ **Do** email a summary of the meeting if you think this is necessary. Always do a summary of the first meeting if you are going to have a follow up meeting. The summary should document the major decisions made in the meeting and next steps.
- ✚ **Do** avoid overlapping meetings. Did you end the first meeting with a clear statement of next steps? Did you summarize the major decisions and next steps after the first meeting? If your answer is "Yes" and "Yes", pick up the second meeting where the first meeting ended. Otherwise, you'll spend part of the second meeting going over the same ground almost as if the first meeting never happened.

By Fran Cook and Joyce Short, June 23, 2008