

HOW TO RUN A MEETING *

** Summary of "How to Run a Meeting" by Antony Jay, published in Harvard Business Review, March-April, 1976*

BEFORE THE MEETING, ASK YOURSELF, "WHAT IS THIS MEETING INTENDED TO ACHIEVE?"

The possible functions of a meeting are:

- to provide information, such as progress reports, which require no conclusion, decision or action
- to decide "What shall we do?"
- to decide "How shall we do it?"
- to change the organization's framework and routines

DRAW UP AN AGENDA TO SPEED AND CLARIFY THE MEETING

When structuring the agenda, you may want to:

- include the reason for each topic to be discussed
- put items requiring creative, bright ideas high on the list
- put items which are of great concern to everyone further down the list, so they will carry the meeting over the attention lag that sets in after 15-20 minutes
- find a unifying item with which to end the meeting
- avoid dwelling too long on trivial but urgent items
- limit the meeting to 2 hours
- keep background papers short and simple
- be sure all items have been thought through in advance. Listing "any other business" on the agenda is an invitation to waste time.

TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CHAIR, THINK OF YOURSELF AS THE SERVANT OF THE GROUP RATHER THAN ITS MASTER

The chair's role should be:

- to assist the group toward the best conclusion in the most efficient manner
- to interpret and clarify
- to move the discussion forward
- to bring discussions to a resolution that everyone understands and accepts as being the will of the meeting, even if individuals do not agree

AS YOU CHAIR THE MEETING, KEEP IN MIND THAT YOU HAVE TWO TASKS -
DEALING WITH THE SUBJECT, AND DEALING WITH THE PEOPLE

Dealing with the subject:

- introduce the issue, the reason it is on the agenda, the story so far, and present position, what need to be done, possible courses of action
- keep the meeting pointed toward the objective
- terminate the discussion early enough. Close a discussion if more facts are required, the meeting needs the views of people not present, members need more time to think about the subject, events are changing and likely to alter the basis of the decision, there is not enough time to cover the subject properly, or two or three members can settle this outside the meeting.
- briefly summarize what was agreed upon

Dealing with the people:

- start on time
- be sensitive to seating arrangements
- control the garrulous
- draw out the silent, especially when people are quiet because of nervousness or hostility
- protect the weak, possibly by taking pains to commend their contributions
- encourage the clash of ideas, but discourage the clash of personalities
- discourage people from squashing suggestions. If people feel that making a suggestion will provoke negative reactions, they will soon stop.
- come to the most senior members last - junior members may feel inhibited once someone of high authority has pronounced on a topic
- talk to members the day before a meeting to ensure that any important points are raised that come better from the floor
- close on a note of achievement

BEFORE DISPERSING,

- REVIEW COMMITMENTS MADE AT THE MEETING,
- ASK FOR SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS, AND
- FIX THE TIME AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING.

Summary prepared by C.Salins, Washington Public Campaigns, August 2009