9 Tips for Running Efficient and Engaging Meetings

1. Have an Agenda that clearly outlines items for discussion and *approximate time frames* for each.

2. Start on Time to show respect for participants and encourage people to arrive on time for future meetings (since they know they'll miss out if they are late!)

3. Assign a meeting leader to take the group through the agenda and facilitate discussion.

4. Prepare – For all items on the agenda, research necessary background information in advance, and make sure key decision-makers plan to attend.

5. Invite everyone to be heard – The meeting leader should make sure everyone feels welcome to share their ideas. People may hesitate to speak because they are shy or feel like decisions have already been made. Take the time to invite discussion: ask people directly for their thoughts, especially on sensitive topics. When people share, voice your appreciation for their input, even if you disagree.

6. Invite everyone to "take charge" of something – Committee leaders may feel pressured to take charge of every task, but don't try to "do it all!" Throughout the meeting, offer opportunities for people to step up and take ownership of a task. Then be sure to let them run with it.

While some people will dive right in, others may need your help figuring out how they can contribute. Take note of people's skills and interests and identify tasks that would be a good fit.

Here's a quick litmus test: Scan the meeting agenda. If you put a name next to who is in charge of each item, would you see a variety of names, or the same one or two for everything? Aim for lots of variety!

7. DO Interrupt & Use the "Parking lot" - While we usually try NOT to interrupt people, when you're the meeting leader, sometimes you have to! When conversations get sidetracked, bring things back on track, even if that means (politely) interrupting off-topic conversations.

If someone continues repeating the same off-topic issue, it may be that they don't feel they've been heard. The meeting leader should directly acknowledge the point and either: address it immediately, set a plan for how it will be addressed later, or explain why it is not the right fit for the group to address.

You can keep a running list of topics to put in the "parking lot" until later. This acknowledges that they need to be addressed, but not at that moment. At the end of the meeting, make a plan to address them (put on the agenda next time, form a subcommittee, etc).

8. Follow up – Once the group has decided to take action, establish who is responsible for the next steps and set a deadline. Include an update on the next meeting's agenda.

9. Don't be TOO efficient - You CAN have too much of a good thing. We want meetings with a fun and engaging atmosphere, where the group feels free to bond, joke, and share their thoughts openly. So make sure there's a little breathing room in the agenda, and take the time to chat informally before and after the meeting.