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# Your choice—dental work or a meeting?

## Book Review: Book excerpt makes meetings easier to make first choice

May 17, 2013 | By [Debra Lins](#) | Comments: [0 Comments](#)



Which would you rather do, go to a meeting? Or go to the dentist?

If the dentist's chair looks pretty good compared to conference room chairs, you attend too many badly run meetings.

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*Fundamentals That Will See You Successfully Through Your Career.* [Her review](#) gave the book a big thumbs up and we've been scanning the book ourselves.

The section on running better meetings had strong appeal--not that we're so fond of dentists, either.

So we asked AMA--the American Management Association--for permission to reprint the meeting section. Here it is:

### **Running Effective Meetings**

Meetings require sustained, purposeful communication. The first rule of running a good meeting, then, is that it have a purpose. If anyone at the table has a legitimate concern and has to ask "Why are we here?" then the manager running the meeting loses ground with his direct reports.

Other common complaints about meetings include:

- They start late.
- There's no clear objective for the meeting.
- The meeting is disorganized.
- Some attendees don't participate.
- Some attendees do all the talking.
- They run longer than they need to be.
- There's no common understanding of the results.

Approaching the meeting in a logical, organized manner is the key to success. There are four steps you can take to help ensure that your meeting is effective:

1. Planning the meeting
2. Announcing the meeting
3. Conducting the meeting
4. Evaluating the meeting

Keep in mind that a meeting fits into the category of communication, so these same steps are valuable reminders of the critical components of any type of communication, including those things you write or say as well. In essence, you want to determine what you're going to communicate, make it clear to the recipient what you will talk or write about, effect the communication, and then figure out whether you got the message across.

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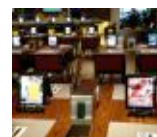
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## Step 1: Planning

Consider these factors in planning your meeting:

*Purpose:* What results do you want from the meeting?

*Agenda:* What topics will be discussed? In what order? In how much depth?

*Length:* When should the meeting be held and how long should it last?

*Attendees:* Who should attend? (Make sure the right individuals are included.)

*Evaluation:* How will you know the meeting has been successful?

Notice, too, that the first three factors (purpose, agenda, and length) constitute the PAL formula for good meeting planning.

## Step 2: Announcing

Give people written notice of the meeting in an e-mail, text message, or memo. Just passing someone in the hall and mentioning that there is a meeting next Tuesday will not suffice. In your written notice, include the agenda. Having an agenda helps everyone plan for the meeting and keeps them focused on the meeting's purpose. Your advance agenda should also include additional information that will help prepare others for their participation in the meeting.

Use the PAL formula to let people know about the meeting. For example:

Please plan to attend a staff meeting in the conference room on Tuesday, June 24 at 10:00 a.m. Be prepared to discuss the following topic in detail. Please bring all ideas with you.

**Purpose:** To develop a process to introduce the new software system to the entire organization.

**Agenda:**

1. Introductions
2. Current status of the software system
3. Discussion of the process required for the software introduction
4. Identification of who will be involved
5. Development of target dates
6. Assignment of responsibilities
7. Next steps
8. Meeting evaluation

**Length:** 4 hours. Lunch will be provided.

### Step 3: Conducting

By definition, a meeting means coming together. By connotation, it suggests the interaction of those who have come together. Keep that in mind and avoid domination or "information dump" by any single individual. All participants want and need a chance to talk about their ideas and help develop solutions for the meeting purpose. Ask yourself: If someone sitting at the table has nothing to contribute, then why is he there?

#### Tips for Productive Meetings

- Start the meeting with general information about the purpose. This gives everyone a common foundation from which to begin the communication.
- Establish some "meeting-keeping" roles. These roles include timekeeper, agenda cop, scribe, and moderator. This will help ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and that meeting notes will be available for everyone.
- Have a mechanism for retaining good off-topic ideas. One approach is to have the person write the thought on a piece of paper and hand it to the agenda cop for inclusion at the appropriate moment. Another is to have the participant put the thought on a Post-it note and place it on a whiteboard designated as a "parking lot" for ideas. In this way, the thought is acknowledged and not forgotten.
- Follow the agenda.
- Generate discussion among all attendees. Ways to do this include:
  - Ask for feedback.
  - Ask another attendee to paraphrase what was just said.
  - Encourage participation by asking quiet attendees what they think.
  - Reflect what you think is being said or thought.
  - Support participants' ideas.
- Recap the outcomes or results of the meetings. Make sure that all attendees know the action expected of them, based on the meeting's discussions.
- Meet your time commitments. If the meeting is running late, ask participants if they are able to extend the time, or reschedule the meeting continuation for another time.
- Review "parking lot" items. If possible within the originally scheduled time, address these contributions. If time will not permit, ask if another meeting needs to be scheduled with these items on the agenda.

- Set a time for a next meeting. If another meeting is required to achieve the stated purpose, establish the time before everyone leaves. Never set a meeting unless it's necessary and the most efficient way to accomplish a task, though.

#### Step 4: Evaluating

Asking participants for a meeting evaluation can accomplish a few important things, and it does not need to be a formal evaluation, written like a report, to have benefit. First, participants might point out that certain other people should be included in the next discussion. Second, it could yield ideas on enhancing the agenda.

The other major benefits—that is, finding out what participants thought went right or went wrong in the meeting—generally come out of anonymous feedback. A feedback form used to collect anonymous contributions can elicit very helpful information on what people think could be done differently to improve the next meeting. If you choose to use a formal evaluation, consider the value of a meeting evaluation form that asks for both ratings and a brief narrative response. For example:

1. How well did the meeting achieve its stated objectives?

1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 = Somewhat; 4 = Fairly well; 5 = Completely

2. How well did the meeting achieve your personal objectives?

1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 = Somewhat; 4 = Fairly well; 5 = Completely

3. What parts of the meeting helped you most to do your job?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which ones helped you least?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

5. What actions will you take as a result of the meeting?

6. Other comments?

When you get feedback from your employees, use it. If a keen insight

comes out of an evaluation, make it clear through action and open acknowledgment that the change you're making came about because of someone's good idea.

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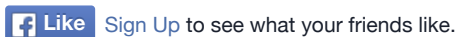
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#### Debra Lins

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