

“Yes, I Do
Have an
Agenda!”



Help for new principals to conduct engaging and meaningful faculty meetings

By John F. Eller and Sheila A. Eller

New principals are sometimes discouraged to overhear school staff members saying, “Oh, another boring meeting tonight,” or “I need some caffeine to get through our upcoming staff meeting.”

Teachers can get to know you, your leadership style, and what you value based on how you facilitate faculty meetings and other meetings at your school. You’ll want to model effective teaching and learning strategies in conducting these meetings.

The following ideas can help you make meetings more productive events that staff may actually look forward to attending.

Purpose for Meetings

In preparing for faculty meetings, reflect on the purpose(s) for holding them. They should be scheduled when you need to gather the collective ideas and input of your staff. Meetings also ensure the entire staff understands and is able to implement important procedures and processes. Finally, gathering everyone together can

be an effective way to brainstorm and select ideas to address issues and problems.

Holding meetings simply to disseminate information or because “we always meet on Wednesdays” will cause people to dread them and view you in a negative light. Ensuring meetings are called for the right purpose is a good first step to improving them.

Effective Meeting Attributes

Effective Group Facilitation in Education (2004) presents several strategies and techniques to develop meaningful and engaging meetings. We’ll highlight a few here.

1. Develop a quality agenda. A well-planned and developed agenda ensures the meeting is focused and addresses its purpose or purposes. Agendas inform staff about the priorities of the meeting while helping to format their thinking in preparation for items to be addressed. When staff see a written agenda, they know what to pay attention to and be ready to discuss in order to fully participate in the meeting.

2. Provide specific times for each agenda item to help keep the meeting on track and moving forward.

When the allotted time has been exhausted, you can move to the next agenda item. In other situations, a less specific, more open agenda allows you to spend more time on certain items if the discussion is productive or more time is needed to resolve the issues.

3. Avoid “overloading” agendas. Constantly running out of time and having to postpone addressing items can lead to frustration. In developing agendas, carefully consider the amount of time needed for the various items, and allow adequate time to ensure the group can address the major points. Limiting the agenda items to things people can address within the time constraints helps the group to stay motivated and engaged.

Start Meetings With Positivity

Just as people judge a speaker during the first few minutes of a speech, people form their opinion of your meeting during the initial few minutes. Here are two strategies that can be used to start meetings positively and productively.

1. Use music. Music can be a powerful and beneficial way to make meetings more productive. One use of music can be to call people to the meeting. You can play a song over the PA system and let staff know the meeting will start at the end of the song. Staff appreciate the novelty of this approach, and many have fun with it by dancing and singing along. Even if the music is not used to call people together, playing it at the start of a meeting sets a positive tone and helps to minimize some of the issues that may have come up before the meeting. We’ve seen people completely change their attitude when they enter the meeting room and hear a song.

During a meeting, music can help with transitions from one activity or topic to another. For example, if you have people working on small groups discussing ideas to address a situation, playing a short part of a song signals that it is time to refocus their attention.

In selecting music for meetings, focus on songs that are upbeat and motivational. These types of songs can communicate to the emotional side of people and set a positive and productive tone that will carry through the rest of the meeting.

2. Share good news. Another tone-setting activity is to ask faculty members to share some good news related to their personal or professional lives at the

beginning of a staff meeting. This activity is called “Good News.” In implementing this activity, we usually set aside 5–10 minutes at the beginning of the meeting for the good news process.

In working with hundreds of staff, the good news strategy has become contagious. If we forget to include it on the agenda of a meeting, staff remind us and ask us to add it. Over time, this strategy builds strong, positive, and productive relationships and leads to a positive, productive school culture.

Your staff will branch out from just sharing good professional news and begin to share more personal examples. They will get to know each other, which leads to more collaborative working relationships and productive school culture.

Transform Meetings Into Learning/ Development Opportunities

Once the meeting has started, it’s important to make sure staff members are engaged in processing information and/or learning. For example, if you are asking for ideas to address a situation, you should use a structured brainstorming process to ensure everyone is engaged. If you are asking some staff members to share successful classroom strategies, you should give the group a chance to meet in small groups to discuss what they have learned from the strategies shared. By incorporating the opportunity for teachers to learn new ideas, you make your meetings more meaningful and motivating. Meetings in which learning occurs are seen as worthwhile and helpful to the faculty’s work with students.

Putting Ideas Into Practice

Operating engaging and meaningful staff meetings does not have to be difficult. By implementing some of the strategies discussed in this article, new principals can be well on their way to making staff meetings interesting and engaging opportunities that staff will look forward to, rather than situations they dread. 

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