

Management and Performance Associates – Newsletter – March 2015

I see what you mean!

How many meetings do you remember as being really productive? How many do you prefer to just forget about because they were so unproductive? How many books or articles have you read or how many videos have you seen about effective meetings? Well, by now you've figured out this article will cover **our difficulty in making our meetings productive and inspiring.**

As funny as it may seem, **we** are the big problem with meetings. We've all seen – and acted like - the following classic types of meeting participants:

- **The "Leader"** states his opening words and immediately becomes ignored by everyone.
- **The Clock-Watcher** believes observing time is more important than the outcome of the meeting.
- **The Late Arriver** comes as he/she pleases (or can), always with a convenient excuse.
- **The Naysayer** always finds a problem to any solution. And if that's not the case, complains about the weather or something else.
- **The Conceptual Speaker** uses metaphors and images from a thousand feet up in the sky.
- **The Blah Blah Blah-er** cannot get the audience to understand a word of his convoluted speech.
- **The Domineering Person** believes that an idea better than his or her own is yet to be born.
- **The Networker** is always present physically, although mentally, he's just checking his social networks.
- **The Frustrated Writer** volunteers to record ideas on a flip chart, unfortunately nobody can decipher what is being written.
- **The Jumping Jack** jumps from one topic to another, regardless of what the conversation is covering.

And so on. The list of characters may continue *ad infinitum*. Add to that the lack of an agenda, low clarity of expectations, the lack of a visual focus, low willingness or ability to listen and the inexistence of a skilled meeting facilitator and you're left with a recipe for failure.

What can be done?

Make your meetings visual. They are more fun, interactive, balanced and productive. In addition to feeling involved, participants feel ownership of the process and also part of the solution. It is important to make it clear right from the beginning that we are not talking about artistic drawings but having a sense of space organization to capture and summarize the core of the conversations, using words, lines, graphics and charts. Anybody can grab a marker and create a visual focus, writing and drawing on a piece of paper. This has the power to engage the audience and later becomes a record of agreement.

The increased use of visual meetings has inspired some companies to stop using flip chart paper and paint all the walls with a special cover that allows use of erasable markers. Therefore, each space, corner or wall becomes a meeting room.

To be effective, visual meetings need to be supported by the following:

1 | Agenda

We all know about the need for an agenda. We suggest it includes no more than three points for discussion, with defined priorities and time allotted for each topic. It has to be forwarded to participants before the meeting, and then it becomes a summary at the end of the meeting. By doing this, everyone will be clear about roles,



responsibilities, expectations, deliverables and target dates.

2 | Facilitator

A facilitator brings life to a meeting. The biggest challenge for the facilitator is to see the meeting in perspective, as he or she understands the patterns used in interactions, makes sure all points and persons are listened to, ensures equitable participation, controls time, manages power struggles, therefore obtaining balance in the achievement of the set objective.

One trick never fails: make your meetings interactive and keep the audience engaged by using voting, games, brainstorming, role-playing, pair or trio discussions, etc.

3 | Visual Focus – no, we’re not talking about a PowerPoint presentation

One of humanity’s most basic and primitive tools is the ability (and joy) to draw and tell stories using images. On top of that we humans have an innate ability to remember images. Research shows after three days, people remember only 10% of received information given in text format. When images are added to the information, the percentage increases to 30%. In a meeting, anyone –not necessarily the facilitator --can build a visual focus for the audience.

The following materials are needed in large quantities:

- **Paper** – the larger, the better. At least a flip chart and a good easel.
- **Markers** - always with a firm and chiseled tip for lettering in thick lines. Use black or dark blue or green for text and keep the red, orange and light blue or green for highlighting.
- **Post-it pads** - the larger, the better. Many times the idea is not completely clear from the very beginning, making it necessary to move themes around physically until they find their rightful place.

- **Small adhesive colored circles:** useful to highlighting, listing, voting, focusing, grouping items, etc.

The objective of using these items is to involve and engage participants instead of making them passive or skeptical, sometimes sabotaging the discussion or withdrawing and checking their phones for the next diversion. This is not about you being a skilled drawing artist. Nobody cares, providing that you use a firm and decipherable writing with capital letters that are large enough to be seen from 3 yards away.

Finally...

Expectations must be 100% clear for all. Agendas, facilitators and visual focus won’t be enough if all participants in the meeting are not 100% aligned in their expectations, or if they do not clearly understand what is expected of them and clarify their own expectations.

In regards to clear expectations we invite you to see this video. In addition to clearly describing the situation, it’s also hilarious.

The Expert: <http://youtu.be/BKorP55Aqvg>

**Good luck with your next meeting!
And tell us how it went.**

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

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