

## From the Director

# Three Key Questions Around Planning a Great Meeting

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No matter where you work or what you do, it's probably almost time to go to another meeting. Are you excited? Are you hopeful that something will be accomplished? If your answer to both of these questions is "NO," you have our sympathies. Many people like you are passively resigned to wasting a few more hours of their lives in the next meetings they have to attend.

Ineffective, soul-sucking meetings, sadly, are common in the education world (indeed, in the world in general). Take heart though, there is a better way.

You might be relieved to know that meetings can actually serve a useful purpose. Great meetings help create a healthy work culture, and they actually can make your work life more satisfying and productive.

Great meetings don't just happen by accident, though. They require proper planning, structure, and ideally some collaboration and facilitation training for everyone involved (or at the very least, for the person leading the meeting).

Proper planning is essential to a great meeting. Here are three questions you should ask when planning any meeting.

### **Question #1: Do you really need to meet?**

This seems obvious, but think of any mandatory weekly or monthly meetings built into your work schedule. If you find yourself facing another weekly meeting and trying to figure out what you can do to fill up the time, your meeting will become just that—filler.

No one will leave a "filler" meeting feeling as if anything real was accomplished. If you don't really need to meet, don't meet.

If you do need to meet on a regular basis, make sure you have a clear meeting structure in mind. Great meetings are designed and structured to accomplish specific goals. Which leads us to...

### **Question #2: Why are you meeting?**

Again, this seems like an obvious question. Of course you need to know why you are meeting! Unfortunately, many meetings are doomed before they start because no one spent any time thinking about the specific purpose of the meeting beforehand.

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To answer this question, consider first the condition or event that triggered the meeting. Then think about the outcome you desire. Both of these factors will influence your answer to...

### **Question #3: What is the best structure for this meeting?**

You should structure your meeting based on the reason for your meeting. A meeting for the simple dissemination of information should be structured differently than a meeting where attendees are expected to collaborate, give feedback, or otherwise interact with each other and/or with the person leading the meeting.

For example:

***If your intention is to deliver information*** about a new initiative, and field any questions or concerns, be clear about the purpose upfront. Tell attendees explicitly: “This meeting is being held to give you information about incorporating differentiated instruction into our lesson plans. We will also answer your questions and address any concerns you may have.”

Again, you might want to review “Question 1: Do we need to meet?” Can you simply send an email with the information or disseminate it in another more efficient way? If email isn’t the best option, and you want to make sure that everyone receives the same information at the same time, a meeting is probably the way to go.

***If you require attendees to interact and/or collaborate***, make sure that you are clear about the kind of interaction that needs to take place and what you will do with the information gathered.

You might want the attendees to simply give you feedback on your differentiated instruction program. You plan to use some but not all of the feedback to inform decisions you will make around it. It is critical that you tell attendees up front that the feedback they give in the meeting will be used in this way. That way they don’t feel angry or misled when all of their suggestions are not used, or if their ideas are used in a way that they did not intend.

***If your goal is to allow the group to make a decision*** about how to solve a problem, state this clearly up front. You must accept ahead of time that you are ceding some authority in this situation. You’ve given the group the power to make the decision and you now need to let them make it.

A sure recipe for disaster is deciding, after the process has begun, that you’ve changed your mind and would rather make the decision yourself. Removing decision-making power from the group because they are not moving in the direction you desire is terribly damaging to your credibility and to the group’s trust in you. If you “change the rules” during the meeting, you will, in one fell swoop, destroy any trust that the group has in you.

It’s even worse if you let attendees think they are making a decision during the meeting, and then once the meeting is over, change your mind. They may assume that it was never your intention to let them make the decision in the first place, and thus feel lied to, used, and angry. Why in the world would they ever want to engage in a “collaboration” like this again when it appears that the whole exercise was a sham? Repeated episodes of this nature will poison your relationships and possibly your entire school

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culture.

If you want your group to decide something, you must commit to it fully. If you're not comfortable with letting the group make this decision, then don't mislead them in the first place.

Considering these three questions when preparing for your next meeting will go a long way towards making your meeting more ef-

ficient, productive, and rewarding for everyone involved.



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P.S. If you'd like some help getting your meeting facilitators better equipped, call or [email](#) us.

