

# How to Run a Meeting

by Mike Hawkins  
[mike@alpinelink.com](mailto:mike@alpinelink.com)



There is little that is more frustrating than attending a meeting that has a hidden objective (unintentionally or otherwise), drags on forever, and accomplishes very little. And for good reason. Studies have shown that 75% of the time people spend in meetings is wasted. Many meetings add little value and in addition to wasting time, they often create non-value adding work that requires additional time which further subtracts efficiency from the organization.

There has been much written about improving meetings. Yet meeting best practices are rarely followed. Meetings occur in conference rooms and other venues daily that waste valuable human effort and company resources. Many believe it is a simple matter of bringing people together to sort out an issue or share information. What they don't realize is that with just a little more thought and preparation, the meeting and its outcome can be greatly improved.

Here are twenty-four best practices I've found that make meetings not only more productive, but engaging and likely to produce tangible results.

1. **Objective:** Develop a clear meeting objective and state it in the meeting invitation. Start with the end in mind and communicate what the successful conclusion will look like and what it will accomplish.
2. **Invitation:** In the meeting invitation, state the specific time, date, location, attire, prerequisites and other relevant information. Provide links to hotels, maps and other reference documents so attendees don't have to spend time trying to find them on their own.
3. **Background:** Provide any relevant background information to all attendees prior to the meeting so everyone has the same level of understanding coming into the meeting.
4. **Notice:** Give sufficient notice for any meeting prerequisites such as creating a presentation, analyzing data, reading a report or taking a survey.
5. **Facilities:** Check out the meeting facilities prior to the meeting. Ensure the venue is free of distractions and has the necessary equipment and supplies needed.
6. **Start:** Start the meeting on time. Don't punish those that arrive on time by waiting for those that don't.
7. **Handout:** Provide everyone with a meeting outline or handout on which they can take notes.
8. **Agenda:** At the beginning of the meeting, review the agenda and gain consensus on the approach you plan to use to reach the meeting objective.
9. **Scope:** Outline any constraints limiting the scope of the meeting, resources available, or other factors that need to be taken into consideration during the meeting.
10. **Climate:** Set the meeting climate. Establish the expected level of cooperation, discussion, urgency, responsibility, transparency, etc.
11. **Ground Rules:** Maintain meeting control by establishing, communicating, and enforcing the meeting's ground rules. Quickly deal with grandstanding, topic hopping and other issues. Ensure that opinions are not misinterpreted as facts.
12. **Scribe:** Have a scribe assigned to record key points, specific actions, due dates and owners.
13. **Introductions:** Introduce guests and ensure everyone in attendance knows the other meeting attendees and their purpose for attending. Have everyone introduce themselves if there are attendees that don't know each other.
14. **Sponsor:** If a meeting is being held based on an executive sponsor's request, ensure they are in the meeting or available by phone to kick it off. Worst case, have them produce a short video clip that can be shown at the beginning of the meeting.
15. **Time:** Put a time limit on discussions and brainstorming exercises. Ask people to be aware of and respectful of the time.



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16. **Buy-In:** Gauge buy-in and understanding at each step of the meeting. Don't let unresolved issues build-up and impact subsequent steps.
17. **Decisions:** When making decisions, look out for typical biases such as the information availability bias, sunk cost bias, status quo bias, own position confirmation bias, primacy effect and recency effect. Foster constructive challenge and debate.
18. **Format:** Keep the monologs to a brief minimum. Studies show that people hold their attention on average for only 7 minutes. Make the material interactive. Use exercises, role plays, questions and discussion to break up the format and keep people engaged.
19. **Content:** Use guest speakers, multi-media, pictures, stories, examples, frameworks and visual aides to keep the content interesting.
20. **Responsibility:** Rotate the hosting of recurring meetings among the regular attendees to maintain diversity and share responsibility.
21. **Summary:** At closing, summarize all the agreed upon key points and the specific actions to be taken including due dates and assigned owners.
22. **Schedule:** Keep the breaks at the agreed upon times and end the meeting on time. People have conference calls and other commitments they've scheduled.
23. **Notes:** Transcribe the relevant meeting notes and send them out to all meeting participants.
24. **Follow-Up:** Track and follow-up on the meeting actions to ensure they are completed.

Mike Hawkins is president of Alpine Link Corporation, a consulting firm specializing in helping individuals and organizations reach their peak potential. For this and other Alpine Link business articles, visit:  
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