Facilitating Better Meetings

STAY IN ROLE

Your role is to watch the "process" not to weigh in on "content." As soon as you take an active role in the dialog, you lose your effectiveness as a neutral facilitator of the group dynamics.

TIME IS KING

The shorter the meeting, the better. People will thank you profusely. Watch the time and find every opportunity to speed the dialog and bring focus to the agreed objectives of the team.

COME PREPARED

Invite the right people. Be clear on the reason to meet. Is it to share information or make decisions? Create an agenda. Do your homework and bring the right materials. You're setting the tone.

SET THE RULES

No cell phones or laptops, unless used in the meeting. People need to be on time and stay until the end. Managers don't get to follow different rules because of status.

ASSERT YOURSELF

Politely reel in people who talk too much, go too deeply into details, talk off-topic or don't respect other people's time. Remind people you want to keep the meeting focused and on time.

ENGAGE EVERYONE

Use round-robins, brainstorms, journaling, and small group discussions. Assign people time-keepers and note-takers to keep them engaged. Watch the dynamics and energy of the group.

STAY OPEN

If the discussion goes off the agenda, check in with the group to see if it's okay to amend the agenda. Don't be regimented and non-responsive to the group's needs but uphold the agenda, too.

TAKE IT OFF-LINE

When two people are spending too much time on one issue, ask them to take it off-line. Capture off-topic issues on a flip chart "parking lot" to be addressed in a future meeting.

USE ACTIVE LISTENING

Reflect and summarize what people say to keep the conversation focused.

Helpful expressions

"I want to check in with the group to see what we want to do."

"I'm concerned how long we're taking on this topic."

"Can we put this issue aside for now and re-visit it shortly?"

"I want to make sure we have enough time to cover the agenda."

"How would you summarize what you just said?"

"Is this a conversation that you two can have one-on-one or later?"

"Are we still talking about the same issue?"