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How to run a meeting that won't tick off employees

Ending late is one of workers' biggest meeting pet peeves

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Hate when meetings run late? Find yourself annoyed when you leave a meeting that didn't really seem necessary?



You're probably not the only one in your office who feels that way. Nearly a third of workers polled recently by Accountemps, a division of **Robert Half International** that focuses on temporary staffing, said beginning or ending late is their biggest meeting pet peeve. Another 27 percent said they can't stand attending meetings that seem unnecessary.

"It's important for managers to really understand what's on their [employees'] plate," says Richard Deosingh, a regional manager for Robert Half International, a staffing firm. "Don't have a meeting [just] to have a meeting."

More than 1,000 senior managers at companies with at least 20 employees participated in the poll.

Especially because many companies are "doing more with less," Deosingh says, "there's only so much time in one day."

So how do you hold a meeting that won't annoy your colleagues? Here are a few ways to make your next office meeting as productive as possible:

Set an agenda--and stick to it. "Set it in advance," Deosingh says, and tell participants what that agenda includes at the beginning of the meeting, so they know what to expect. Throughout the meeting, keep your agenda and goals in mind, helping the group to stay on track.

Set a beginning and end time. "Start on time, finish on time, and allow yourself [time] for questions," Deosingh says. Following this one guideline will help you gain favor with your colleagues because it shows you respect their time.

Ending on time is particularly important because participants start to turn their attention elsewhere at the end of the time slot set aside for that meeting, says Peter Handal, CEO and Chairman of Dale Carnegie Training, which helps workers improve their interpersonal skills. "Their mind isn't on the meeting at the end, so it's not productive," he says.

Make sure an in-person meeting is the best way to deliver the information. Sensitive news, major initiatives, or anything that might prompt discussion is good meeting fodder. Otherwise, consider sharing the information via a conference call or email, and saving your face time for when it's really necessary.

Set a friendly tone from the get-go. Open with a joke or smile so everyone feels relaxed, Handal says. That sets a tone for the entire meeting. If you've established a friendly, conversational tone, participants are more likely to engage in a productive way rather than getting defensive if a controversial topic comes up. A friendly tone also makes participants feel more comfortable participating, which means you'll get more out of the meeting.

Don't interrupt one another. This also landed on Accountemps' list, with 15 percent of respondents saying it's their biggest meeting pet peeve. Your colleagues might have differences in opinion, but encourage them to communicate those ideas respectfully, without cutting each other off.

Try humor. A few laughs can really lighten the mood, helping to set that friendly tone. Even if your jokes fall flat, a smile can go a long way in earning the respect and trust of your employees--as long as it's genuine. Show that you can be productive and enjoy yourself at the same time, and your colleagues will be more likely to follow your lead.

Offer refreshments. Because who's going to pass up a donut? Food can only add to the friendly tone, and it might boost your attendance, too.

Invite a guest. Particularly if it's a regularly scheduled meeting, a guest can help shake things up a bit, Handal says. Maybe they'll offer a new perspective, help lighten the mood, or foster a sense of community. Through the eyes of a guest, you may realize your group is working better together than you'd thought--or you may notice the opposite and see opportunity for improvement.

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