



# Enterprising Rural Families™

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## CHAIRING A DIFFICULT MEETING

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This newsletter is an instrument of the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work* program of University of Wyoming Extension. For further information concerning the *Enterprising Rural Families* program or on-line course contact [information@eRuralFamilies.org](mailto:information@eRuralFamilies.org) or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.

### TIP OF THE MONTH:

#### WHAT'S NEEDED IN A BUSINESS PLAN?

- Executive summary: condensed version of all other sections, opening statement that gives the reader cause to examine the rest of the document.
- Mission, goals, and objectives: the underlying business concept is described along with the stages of development.
- Background information: specifics of the industry and its past and present trends.
- Legal form of ownership and organizational structure management will, people and positions described, as well as bookkeeping and financial procedures.
- Marketing section: one of most important parts, will show whether you have really researched and defined your market and what you have to offer.
- Financial plan: salaries, wages, and benefits; outside services; insurance; advertising; occupancy expense; sales forecasts; costs of goods sold; fixed assets; growth expenses; and miscellaneous expenses.
- Appendix: numerous supporting documents such as a timetable for action, market research, resumes, specifications, testimonials, etc.

Meetings are a fact of life. We meet for many reasons, some critically important to the success or future of a business or organization, some are simply a means to connect socially and enjoy common interests. Meetings can be a vital management tool for an enterprise. Properly run meetings save time, increase motivation, improve communication and productivity, solve problems and can be strategic to an enterprise's success.

The need to run effective meetings has increased because of the ever increasing pressures on people's time and the costs associated with meeting. Time and thought expended preparing for a meeting can greatly impact the outcome of the meeting.

Careful preparation, effective communication before, during and after the meeting, intentionally addressing topics and being prepared with the right resources at the meeting are critical elements to effective meetings. Add the skill of the chair to adhere to the agenda and ability to manage the people component of the meeting, and there can be successful conclusions to a meeting. Additional benefits are effective use of time and resources and personal satisfaction of goals accomplished.

Many meetings fail due to lack of planning and preparation. Chances are those meetings that occur on Wednesday, because it's Wednesday and that's when we always meet, are not the most productive use of participants' time. If a meeting is worth the organization's time and the costs associated with it, the meeting should have both a purpose and some forethought to it. A checklist for preparing a meeting:

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- Define the meeting outcomes/products
- Select participants
- Identify probable issues
- Develop the agenda and distribute prior to the meeting with pertinent support materials

What is the desired outcome of the meeting?

Decision

Discussion

Information (Giving or Getting)

Planning

Generating ideas

Finding solutions

Agreeing (targets, budgets, goals)

Policy statement

Team-building/motivation

Creating an initiative



- Determine key components of the meeting and time needed to address each
- Determine meeting date, time and appropriate location
- Develop and distribute meeting notice
- Hold preliminary discussions as needed in advance of the meeting
- Prepare the room and meeting logistics

For critical or controversial meetings, the preliminary work is essential. It may be important for the chair to hold preliminary discussions with one or more participants in advance of the meeting. Some reasons to hold preliminary discussions might be:

- ✓ The issues are complex and it would be helpful to have a few members of the group create a starting place for discussion
- ✓ A critical mass is needed to move a decision forward and you want to seek an initial agreement from a core group
- ✓ One or more of the members have an inadequate understanding of the issue, and ensuring that everyone is briefed will prevent misunderstandings or having to spend meeting time to repeat information
- ✓ One or more participants tend to point out problems and it would be more productive for the organization to get them focusing on seeking solutions
- ✓ One or more participants stand to lose something if the meeting is successful and it would help if they understood in advance what will likely happen in the meeting



Choose a meeting method that is appropriate for the situation. If a physical meeting is required, decide what sort of meeting is appropriate for the situation. The agenda becomes a tool that helps to guide the group through the topics. The agenda should provide the participants enough time to accomplish the goals of the meeting.

How can the agenda assist in chairing a difficult meeting? The meeting agenda becomes a roadmap for the meeting. It lets participants know where they're headed and it helps focus attention to the discussion at hand. Some of the difficult behavior that occurs in meetings can be alleviated by attention to the agenda.

When developing the agenda, begin with the end in mind. The agenda should enable the chair to bring the meeting to the desired outcomes for the meeting.

Agendas should include the following:

- Meeting start and end time
- Meeting location
- Topic headings and some detail for each topic
- Indicate the time each topic is expected to last
- Indicate who is expected to be prepared to provide information for topics
- Indicate what action is expected with the topic. Is the topic on the agenda for information, discussion or will a decision be needed?

Time management is important to everyone. Indicating at the beginning of a meeting the amount of time an item will have on an agenda can help to focus discussion. Articulating the expected action in the agenda for each topic will allow participants to engage in the discussion appropriately. Often difficult behavior from meeting participants comes from not understanding the purpose of the meeting and confusion over the desired outcomes. Topics moving too fast or too slow can create difficulty in staying engaged for some participants. Put the less important issues at the top of the agenda. A synergy develops when groups are able to build upon success. If the group has several successfully completed tasks, they will approach the more difficult topic with a "we can do this also" attitude.

*It's not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about? ... Henry David Thoreau*



There are most likely emotions involved when a meeting becomes difficult. A difficult meeting requires planning and careful development of, and adherence to, the agenda. Technology affords us many avenues to conduct business. The research of Dr. Albert Mehrabian supports the need for face to face meetings when the communication of feelings and attitudes is necessary. His research found the written word only carries 7% of the true meanings and feelings being communicated. Meetings are better than telephone conferences because only 38% of the meaning and feeling expressed is carried in the way that things are said. The other 55% is carried in facial expression and non-verbal signals.

An effective chair scans the group for body language and creates opportunities for quiet participants to become engaged, and for vocal participants to have opportunities to listen. It is easier to misunderstand what is being said when non-verbal language is not being noticed.

Establishing Ground Rules can assist a chair in dealing with difficult behaviors in a meeting. Consider ground rules that guide what people do (procedural) and how they do it (behavioral). Over time, the ground rules will help the group become self-correcting.



Some sample ground rules:

*Start and end on time*

*Everyone participates*

*No beeps, buzzes, or Beethoven's 5th*

*Meeting work, only*

*ELMO (enough, let's move on)*

*Be soft on people; hard on ideas*

*Share all relevant information*

*Explain reasoning and intent*

*Stay on topic*

*One person speaks at a time*

*Take care of the minutes and the hours will take care of themselves*

*.....Lord Chesterfield*



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