

Meetings That Motivate

"By nature meetings are dull, dreary, and dreaded-but with a little effort you can create meetings that people look forward to and that will drive your company ahead!"

Meetings They Love; Meetings They Hate

I love to talk at meetings. I love to lay out grand strategies, lofty goals, and ambitious initiatives.

But guess what? My managers hate it! They're tired of hearing me talk!

What they really want to do is participate in the meetings. They don't just want to give a couple of words of feedback at the end of the meeting-they want to play a core role in formulating decisions. I find that when I don't go to the extra effort to set up a forum so that they can easily join the discussion, then I end up dominating the meeting-and I don't get my managers' full support.

But I've found that if my managers really feel they've participated at meetings, they leave feeling empowered, invigorated, and fully committed to whatever course we have chosen to pursue.

Get The Competitive Juices Flowing!

There's nothing like a look at the competition to get people excited! I've found that you can lay the foundation for a great interactive meeting by starting with a close examination of just one of your competitors. Ask people, "What do they do well? Not so well? What can we learn from them?"

I've found that taking a look at the competition is a particularly good way to get managers involved in the discussion, even when they represent very diverse functions. "How does this company use its credit policy to compete? Does it keep deep inventories? What's its cost structure? Where does it spend its marketing dollars?"

I've found that even when reviewing a much weaker or smaller competitor, you can always find at least one thing that they are doing much better than you!

Have A Micro-Focus!

Again and again I find myself starting meetings with a very broad focus, saying, for example, "Any new marketing ideas today?" Then everyone says to themselves, "Not another boring meeting." Why do I fall into the trap of having meetings that lack focus? Frankly, because I just didn't take a few minutes to prepare a more specific topic.

But when I do give the meeting a more specific focus-for example, "How can we increase the retail shelf presence of product A?"-then people jump into the discussion, and the meeting moves ahead.

Focus makes meetings work. Focus on one product, or one customer, or one supplier, or one market niche.

Even at the giant retailer Wal-Mart, where hundreds of managers crowd into an auditorium for weekly meetings, they might focus on the sale of one product type, like beach apparel, at just one store. Then at the end, they try to see if any conclusions they reach can be applied more broadly.

Use Another Idea Source!

The worst way to get my managers to buy into an idea is to announce it myself. The best way is to have it emerge from one of them during a group discussion.

But I find that my managers don't stay up late at night the way I do, looking for exciting new ideas to discuss at meetings. So sometimes I'll take a middle road.

Instead of just presenting something as my idea,

I'll quote a stimulating short passage from a book or magazine article.

My managers are a lot more receptive to hearing suggestions from a third-party expert, and an outside voice helps liven up the meeting. Besides, this gives me more incentive to look for fresh ideas myself!

So You Missed Your Budget Again!

Variance analysis-comparing actual sales, costs, and profits with the budget-is a basic managers meeting topic. But it can also be explosive! I've learned the hard way that berating managers in a group setting for missing a budget is a big mistake! Remember that with even half-dedicated managers, the numbers speak for themselves!

So keep the focus on what can be done differently in the future! The past is done-so discuss it only to learn, not to criticize!

Last spring our sales were way off budget. But our profits were slightly above target, because our costs were way under budget. My first tendency at budget meetings was to focus overwhelmingly on the sales problem. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that we had achieved new breakthroughs in cost control and that we needed to examine how we had done this so we could make sure we continued to do it in the future!