



Timely Information for Personal Success

## Run Better Meetings with Action Steps

By Mike Jacquart

Regardless of where you work or what you do, good ideas can be forgotten, while other proposals may not warrant follow up. Let's face it, there are only so many hours in the day, and seemingly countless tasks need to be prioritized. This means even a good suggestion can slip through the cracks. That said, many good, even great, workplace ideas and plans get left on the doorstep for one simple yet overlooked reason: *The next step is not clear, and so no one follows through adequately.*

### The Importance of Follow Up

Part of the problem lies in the lack of follow up (some call it "follow through"), which can wreak havoc on a workplace regardless of whether it's an actual promise from the boss or anything else he says he will do, but never does! As the saying goes, "*actions speak louder than words.*"

This problem often stems from inefficient meetings in which next steps are **not** clear.

### You Get out of Meetings what You Put into Them

Many meetings are more social occasions than reasons for conducting business – and when management takes that tack it becomes easy to start eliminating them – as staff start seeing them as a waste of time. That's a shame because it need not be that way! Here are some suggestions:

❖ **Don't invite everyone.** On the one hand, it's commendable that a supervisor or manager wants to get sufficient input, but too many people in a meeting can be counterproductive. As the saying goes, you can have too many cooks in the kitchen. When sending out invitations, consider if the person is likely to have something to contribute to the meeting, or if he/she is being invited simply because "*John has always been asked.*" In many cases, "cc-ing" someone like John in a memo may

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# What Employees REACT Want in a Leader

Here's how to be the organizational leader your team wants:

**Don't be wishy-washy:** Be someone who understands their level of responsibility and is decisive about direction. No one enjoys being on a rudderless ship.

**Lead by example:** As a leader, you are always being watched. You must always practice what you preach. Whether you stay late or leave early, employees notice!

**Unify your team:** Connect employees to work toward a common goal.

## Be clear about what you want:

Great leaders always clearly communicate their intent. Your team should understand your direction so they can execute that vision.

**Lend an ear:** Leaders create a safe environment where differing opinions are heard and considered. Rubber-stamp meetings are useless. ■

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be sufficient. This way, the staffer is “in the loop,” but neither is the meeting likely to waste time and effort because too many people are present. More is not always better!

❖ **Have a clear agenda.** There's no greater time waster than a business meeting in which it's clear early on there is no real reason for getting together other than to “chew the fat.” A solid agenda includes the date, who is running the meeting, names of attendees, and a concise, bulleted list of topics to be discussed. The leaders should never make the meeting too ambitious for the time allotted! A handful of items is often plenty.

Many meetings run long because the moderator doesn't pay enough attention to time. With that in mind, each agenda item should have a realistic, though *set timeframe*. Will the person need 10 minutes for discussion? 15? The meeting chair needs to give it his/her “best guess” to keep the meeting moving in a lively manner. When meetings drag, attention wanders, and that's never a good thing. The chair may even wish to include a simple goal, or reason for meeting: *Finance Committee to approve 2021 budget, for example.*

❖ **Establish clear action steps.** It is FRUSTRATING for anyone to leave a meeting with little, if any, feel for what's next. Each bulleted item in the agenda should include “*action step*” next to it (or something to that effect). Set this off in different type so it jumps out. **As much as possible**, the individual leading the meeting should attach a name to the action. (*Mike to doublecheck financials before sharing with other business leaders*). If this isn't known at the time, at least list the action to be performed, assign a staff person ASAP, and set a realistic due date – perhaps the next meeting. (*Financials to be doublechecked and reviewed at next meeting at 3 p.m. August 12.*)

Anyone running a meeting should be clear what they want to do, who should initiate the action, and by when. Talk is cheap. Action is what counts. ■

*Mike Jacquart is the editor and publisher of “Employee Assistance Report”, and he edits the “Journal of Employee Assistance” for EAPA. He has been writing about employee assistance and workplace topics and trends since 2004.*