

Running an Effective Meeting & Making Consensus Decisions



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This Session:

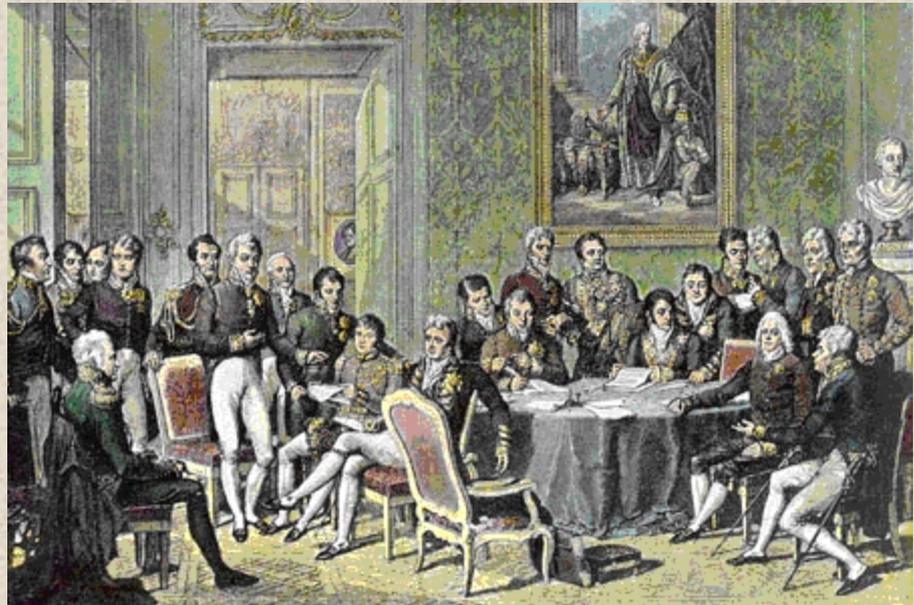


Tips on effective meetings

Consensus decision making

q There are many types of meetings.

q Today I am not talking about “official” meetings, such as government meetings...



This is about meetings in
your community & where
you work.



Personal Effectiveness:

Turn off your cell phone, or set it to vibrate only!



Personal Effectiveness:

Do not assume someone using their smart phone or laptop is not paying attention.



Personal Effectiveness:

Do not use your smart phone or laptop unless its use is related to the meeting.

But....

If it is not a regular meeting, and is important and you are facilitating it...



“For the love of
God, please
respect your poor
colleagues’ time.”

Merlin Mann



Those who show up
rule the world.



Those who stay to the end win.



1. Circulate an agenda

- An agenda should show the planned steps that get the meeting from “here” to “there.” It helps the participants prepare appropriately and anticipate the kind of information they might need to produce. Most importantly, it works as a contract with the participants: “here’s why this is a great use of your time for n minutes.”



Running More Productive Meetings by Merlin Mann <http://www.merlinmann.com/> on February 21, 2006 on *43folders* <http://www.43folders.com> 43Folders.com is Merlin Mann's website about finding the time and attention to do your best creative work.

2. Have a theme

- Meetings shouldn't be meandering tours of each participant's frontal lobe (unless – well – unless that's the actual *agenda*). Make it clear *why* this meeting is happening, why each person is participating at a given time, and then use your agenda to amplify how the theme will be explored or tackled in each section of the meeting.



3. Set (and honor) times for beginning, ending, and breaks

- There's nothing worse than a rudderless meeting that everyone knows will just prattle on until its leader gets tired of hearing himself talk. You own your meeting by putting up walls – provide structure and be firm about respecting everyone's time. Give short bio and email breaks on a regular schedule. Honor the time walls.



4. Schedule guests

- Do **not** put thirty people in a room for three hours if twenty of them will have nothing to do for all but the last ten minutes. In your agenda, make it clear when people will be needed and you'll encourage best use of everyone's time. It's also extra incentive (or even an excuse) to tick off agenda items in a timely manner. ("Well, it looks like Henderson is here to share his sales report, so let's move on.")



5. Be a referee and employ a time-keeper

-If you can afford it, have one person in the meeting be the slavish time-keeper so you, as the leader, can focus on facilitating, summarizing, clarifying, and just keeping things *moving*. Working closely with the time-keeper, you should not be afraid to announce things like “Okay, we have three minutes left for this, so let’s wrap up with any questions you have for Alice, then move on.”

Note from presenter: if no time keeper, you are the time keeper.



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6. Stay on target

- Any item that can be resolved between a couple people offline or that does not require the knowledge, consent, or input of the majority of the group should be scotched immediately. Close rat holes. As soon as the needed permission, notification, or task assignment is completed, just move on to the next item.



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7. Follow up

- If you have been utilizing a project manager or note taker (and God knows you should), be sure to use a few minutes at the end for him or her to review any major new projects or action items that were generated in the meeting. Have the PM email the list of resolved and new action items to all the participants.



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8. Be consistent

- Take any of these tips that work for you – and many certainly may not – but understand one thing above all; meetings do not run themselves, and if you have any desire to make best use of valuable people’s time, you’ll need a firm hand and a lot of thoughtful planning. Set a pattern of being the one whose meetings don’t suck and you’ll start seeing the productivity, tone, and participation in your meetings consistently improve.



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Consensus

“Consensus is a decision making process designed to bring together the views of all the members of the group. Consensus does not require everyone to agree on everything, it does require a common goal of the group and willingness to work on problems together. Consensus works if the group can work openly and creatively with concerns of individuals about proposals. The group reshapes proposals until everyone is comfortable with them.”

The process is based on the fundamental belief that each person has a piece of the truth. Consensus is the way a group of equals makes decisions. It is built through a web of reciprocal relationships where each individual rules and is ruled by the larger community.

Consensus decision making has its limitations. It will not work in every situation and it is not a panacea. Five main elements must be in place for it to work:

- (1) a common purpose,
- (2) a willingness to share power,
- (3) informed consent,
- (4) a strong agenda, and
- (5) effective facilitation.

A facilitator is the custodian of the consensus process, a "servant leader"

whose purpose is to help the group make the best decisions possible through effective facilitation. He or she must be consistently neutral and ask questions intended to equalize participation, elicit pertinent information, and clarify the group's situation.

I honour your gods

I drink at your well

I bring an undefended heart to our meeting place

I have no cherished outcome

I will not negotiate by withholding

I am not subject to disappointment

Ancient Bedouin vow

Listening

If you are not open to having your mind changed, you are not listening.



The stages of consensus decision making are **introduction, discussion, and decision.**

1. **The introduction of a proposal or course of action** focuses only on questions about its content and not on its merits.
2. **Discussion of the proposal can begin.** This should start with a discussion of the broad principles behind the idea in order to clarify what is being proposed. Next the group should discuss and try to resolve any concerns they may have about the proposal. Agreements should be collected along the way as concerns are raised and the group figures out how to deal with them.
3. **Decision by testing for consensus.** In the consensus process, **no votes are taken.** As the group arrives at the point of decision, **each participant has three options: to block, to stand aside, or to give consent.**

When a participant wishes to block, this prevents the decision from going forward for the time being.

Blocking is a serious step and should only be taken when the participant genuinely believes that the pending proposal, if adopted, would violate the morals, ethics or safety of the whole group. When people elect to block a proposal, they are asked to explain their reasons. If possible, the group tries to resolve the concerns. If the person does not remove his or her block, the decision does not go forward.

If there are no blocks or blocks have been resolved, the group is then asked if anyone wishes to stand aside.

A person stands aside when he or she cannot personally support the proposal but feels that it would be acceptable for the rest of the group to adopt it.

This is a stance of principled nonparticipation and absolves this person from any responsibility for implementing the decision in question.

The names of those standing aside are recorded in the minutes.

If there are more than a few stand asides, more work is needed and consensus has not been reached.

If there are no blocks and not too many stand asides, the facilitator will state:

"We have consensus."

To give consent does not necessarily mean that every participant is in total agreement with every aspect of the proposal.

It does mean that each person is willing to support the decision and stand in solidarity with the group despite whatever disagreements, if any, they may have.

Consensus decisions can only be changed by reaching another consensus.

In summary, "Consensus" is what is meant by the most used English language in the world;

OK