



## Breaking Out of the Traditional Boring Meeting Mold

by Jamie Herzlich

Posted: October 11, 2010

No one likes sitting through a boring, pointless staff meeting, yet that's what many of us have to do on a daily or weekly basis.

If you're looking to avoid a roomful of employees' dull stares at your next staff meeting, you need to find ways to break out of the traditional meeting mold, and that starts with doing less talking and more listening, say experts.

"Meetings aren't just for the big boss and the manager with the biggest title to do all the talking," says Linda Dulye, president of Dulye & Co., a Warwick, N.Y.-based management workplace consultancy. "It's a staff meeting and needs to be communally owned."

Input from staff is critical if you're going to move beyond just a one-sided information share.

"We want people to be engaged at the meeting," says Dulye. "You shouldn't pay people to be spectators."

### Build engagement

That's why she recommends that each meeting have a co-facilitator who can help design the agenda and help lead the meeting. You'd rotate this position among employees. It not only creates engagement within the meeting, but also gives you insight into employees' most pressing concerns, she says.

Create an agenda that can go out at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting so people can prepare and you can keep the meeting on course, Dulye advises.

You may even want to circulate the agenda even further in advance for those who want to suggest topics.

Glenn Friedman, managing partner of the accounting firm Metis Group Llc in Plainview, sends out his agenda a week in advance for just that purpose.

"We want our meetings to be interactive," says Friedman, whose firm has 85 staffers throughout six offices including Long Island.

He says the agenda helps keep the meetings focused.

"It helps with flow," notes Friedman. "You can't just go in there blind and start talking."

Also, be cognizant of time and set realistic time limits on agenda items.

"The shorter, the better in my opinion," says Greg Smith, author of "Ice Breakers & Teambuilding Exercises" (Chart Your Course International; \$39.95) and president of Chart Your Course International, an organizational development firm in Conyers, Ga.

Start on time and end on time, he recommends. If the meeting starts to digress and other issues are raised, you may have to hold a separate meeting later or meet with individuals one on one.

### Ice breakers

"You have to be conscious of everybody's time," says Smith, who likes to start meetings with some sort of ice breaker to get people thinking and interacting.

For instance, you can pass around a roll of toilet paper or a ball and ask some opening questions, like "What's the one skill you need to do your job better," suggests Smith.

Asking questions is a good way to get even the quiet employees interacting, adds Paul Munoz of the HR Group Inc., a human resources consultancy in Plainview.

Let them know what to expect before the meeting. For instance, when you hand out the agenda, you might ask staffers to come prepared to discuss a particular topic/question (i.e., a recent accomplishment or an issue they might be struggling with), he says. If someone isn't participating, call on him or her and ask for input, he says.

"Tell people you expect them to participate in the conversation," says Munoz. "You don't want it to be one person talks and five people take a nap."

### Ice-breaker questions

Which person in this company has helped you the most in your job?

In our company, what do we need to start doing, stop doing and keep doing?