

Leveraging Competencies

I recently came across an article in the publication Business 2.0 that caught me off guard. It outlined a new service that UPS was now getting involved with through its Supply Chain Solutions group. I was originally prepared to read about some new parcel shipping innovation but the article talked about UPS getting into the laptop computer repair business.

Where did that come from? Out of left field? Maybe I read the article wrong?

Actually, what the article talked about was a new program that UPS and Toshiba have worked out to have a facility operated by UPS right next to a UPS air hub that repairs notebook computers. The discovery here was that the technology of repairing the computers was the simplest part of the customer transaction. Most of the transaction with the Toshiba customer that had a broken laptop was in logistics, a core competency of UPS. Getting the PC from the customer to a repair location, getting the parts to that location and then getting it back to the customer in a timely fashion was the majority of the transaction.

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More time is wasted in meetings than any other business activity!

How to Run an Effective Business Meeting

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How productive are your business meetings? Would you describe the culture that governs your meetings to more resemble World War III or crazy chaos? During a meeting, do you focus on the agenda at hand or do you concentrate more on breaking a foam cup into bits? Would you qualify eating all of the donuts in a meeting as a major accomplishment in your agenda? If these meeting scenarios sound familiar to you, you are not alone! Many studies have shown that more time is wasted in meetings than in any other business activity. It is estimated that people spend 20-40% (upper management is much more) of their time in meetings and that meetings are only 44-50% efficient (source: Steve Kaye). By improving the efficiency of your next meeting, you may increase your bottom line.

The first step in improving the efficiency of your business meetings is to recognize that meetings are a collaborative effort. The very definition of a meeting is a TEAM activity where SELECT people gather to perform WORK that requires GROUP effort. All participants of a meeting, therefore, must play a role in remaining focused and progressing through the meeting in a timely manner.

Before calling a meeting, it must first be decided whether it is necessary. Remember, a meeting is not always the most effective way. Other options available might be sending a memo or an email. It is the responsibility of the meeting solicitor to determine the need for calling the meeting and who should attend.

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In general, it is best to invite as few participants as possible (key players only). The solicitor must also review the organization's calendar, reserve the meeting room and assign a meeting facilitator to be in charge of the agenda.

Effective meetings necessitate leadership. Leading a meeting requires attention, confidence, creativity, diplomacy, empathy, flexibility, wits, toughness and yes, humor! The primary role of the leader is to establish the ground rules for the meeting which are namely: to minimize confusion and disruptions and to institute a code of conduct. Some examples of team game rules that are designed to make meetings more effective are:

1. If you are planning to introduce a proposal or discuss an issue in a group meeting, send out any relevant information to all team members several days before the meeting.
2. Review the agenda and bring any relevant materials with you to the meeting so that everyone can make informed decisions.
3. Don't lobby a few members before the meeting and try to ram an idea down the throats of the rest of the group in a "surprise attack". Keep issues above-board and inclusive. "Fight fair".
4. Come to the meeting on time.
5. If you are going to be absent, inform others beforehand and send a stand-in who can make at least some decisions in your name.
6. Focus on listening and seeking understanding before disagreeing.
7. If you are the recorder, distribute complete and accurate minutes to everyone within 48 hours after the meeting.
8. If you agree to something, do what you say you will do. Be accountable to each other.
9. Sarcasm, personal attacks, interrupting, dominating the discussion, or engaging in distracting behavior during a meeting are all non-productive behaviors. Everyone agree not to engage in them.



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10. It is okay to disagree during a meeting, but once the group has made a decision, it needs to be supported by everyone outside of the meeting. Passive resistance, sabotage, negative gossip and guerrilla warfare are not okay.

11. Remember to celebrate successes and to thank members for their efforts.

In addition to implementing these concepts, an effective meeting leader must enforce a code of conduct in order to maintain a safe environment for discussing ideas. The meeting facilitator should compel the meeting attendees to follow some simple guidelines to ensure an orderly meeting:

- ◆ Work as a team
- ◆ No rank in the room
- ◆ One speaker at a time
- ◆ Be an attentive listener
- ◆ Focus on the issue
- ◆ Respect others
- ◆ Suspend judgment
- ◆ Allow curiosity
- ◆ Maintain confidentiality

It is as equally important to end a meeting efficiently as it is to conduct it. Besides just ending a business meeting on time there should be a review of agenda items and results, as well as assignments. A set agenda for the next meeting should also be prepared.

Having an effective business meeting is a key ingredient to having a successful business. If you would like more information on this subject, please feel free to contact us.

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"Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

— Theodore Roosevelt

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I can only imagine the look on the two major organization's leadership faces when the idea was first laid on the table for discussion. Typically, I could hear feedback like "we are not in the computer repair business" or we "can't let a shipping company fix our computers, etc." I applaud these companies for looking hard at their primary business competencies and leveraging them for the benefit of each other and, more importantly, for the benefit of their customers.



TOSHIBA

This week take a hard, strong look at what are your businesses primary competencies? How can you better leverage those competencies for your customers, your vendors, other prospects? What competencies do your vendors have that could supplement your capabilities to take care of your customers? This is not just outsourcing as a hedge against expenses but a strategy to stay focused and exploit your true value in the marketplace.

For more information you can visit the website at: www.business2.com

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What is Your Dignity Worth?

Someone you may consider unimportant or irrelevant could turn out to be the opposite and any hasty or rude correspondences, via letter, email, or in person could ruin your future with these people. We know a Sales Executive who was running late for a business meeting. The traffic was bad, and to make matters worse there was a car in front of him weaving in and out of the lanes and blocking this Sales Exec's path. This annoyed him so much that when he drew near the other car, he let down his window and let forth a tirade of abuse, finishing off with a one finger salute as he drove off.

Imagine his embarrassment later to learn the man he had just insulted on the road was none other than the *Manager of the Company* he had been sent to meet!

This happens... don't let it happen to you. If you're feeling stressed, angry or just plain negative, remember that using good manners is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign that you are "the better person". People can take everything away from you... but they can't take away your dignity. It's priceless. It defines who you are. It's the reason you can stand tall and hold your head high and look anybody in the eye. Be a walking example of dignity!



ONE MINUTE IDEAS

Web Site Of The Month

Information Please has been providing authoritative answers to all kinds of factual questions since 1938—first as a popular radio quiz show, then starting in 1947 as an annual almanac, and since 1998 on the Internet at www.infoplease.com. Many things have changed since 1938, but not their dedication to providing reliable information, in a way that engages and entertains.

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Power words

Remonstrate (ri MAHN stray) v. - to argue against; to protest; to raise objections

Example: My boss remonstrated with me for telling all the secretaries they could take the rest of the week off.

Refute (ri FYOOT) v. - to prove to be false; to disprove

Example: His expensive suit and imported shoes clearly refuted his claim that he was poor.

Salutary (SAL yuh ter ee) adj. - healthful; remedial; curative

Example: Lowered blood pressure is among the salutary effects of exercise.

Sacrilege (SAK ruh lij) n. - a violation of something sacred; blasphemy

Example: The members of the fundamentalist sect believed that dancing, going to movies, and watching television were sacrileges.



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