

Is There a Method to Your Meeting Madness?

By Dianna Booher

“Meetings.... are rather like cocktail parties. You don’t want to go but you’re cross not to be asked.” A keen observation of the typical attitude. But if you do decide that an in-the-flesh, real-time meeting is necessary to achieve your objective, consider the variety of ways to exchange information.

Here are a few suggestions for evaluating interest, exchanging data or opinions, and coming to decisions:

Could you survey by show of hands (or member names or numbers written on a card for the purpose of the meeting) and simply count and report the results? Could you survey by show of hands/names/numbers and then ask meeting participants to note the responses and make arrangements to seek each other out for later private discussions or information sharing?

Could you pose a question and have participants respond electronically or in writing? Collect the ideas, report them, piggyback them, or eliminate the less-often-mentioned ideas?

Could you pose an issue, state the “apparent” opinion/position, and then ask those who have an “exceptional” situation/position/opinion to speak up about those exceptions or objections?

Could you post agree/disagree statements on the wall, pose a question/issue, and then ask meeting participants to go stand beside their response? Have each of the two groups quickly generate a list of reasons for that opinion. Then call on one speaker from each side to succinctly present their list of supporting reasons.

Could you set up an exchange of information in the form of a panel of experts/representatives who can provide necessary information at the START of a discussion rather than after the fact? These few methods of information exchange at meetings may save you innumerable minutes of thoughtful meandering.

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For more tips on effective meetings, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.