



dick massimilian

GREAT LEADERSHIP IS NO ACCIDENT

How to Lead an Effective Virtual Meeting

(and get the results you want)





Lead with an Agenda



People hate wasting time if it's theirs. Start your meeting by (re)articulating its purpose. Say something like, "our objective today is to decide how we'll allocate funds among three departments." Then, ask, "is that consistent with everyone's understanding?" Pause to give people a chance to respond. Resist the urge to plow ahead quickly. If no one chimes in, ask, "OK?" or "All good?" and wait for someone to say "Yes" before proceeding. Doing this grabs people's attention, engages them immediately and launches your discussion powerfully.

- Start by reminding everyone why you're meeting. Lead with the Agenda.

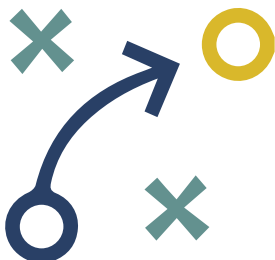
Start on Time (or Say You're Not)



Well-run meetings begin when they are scheduled to begin. When you start on time, you let people know that you value their time, mean business and intend that the meeting succeed. If you must start late, be up front about it. At the scheduled start time, say, "Welcome. It's 9:00am. We're scheduled to start now, but a few people are still not here, so we'll wait two minutes for them. Thanks for your patience." Then, without fail, begin at your new time. If you don't, you undermine your own credibility.

- Preserve the integrity of your meeting. Start on time (or say you're not).

Plan Your First Three Sentences in Advance



Especially in a virtual meeting, your opening statements will either grab and engage your audience or start people thinking about what else they could be doing. Before your meeting, write down what you want to say in your opening 2-3 sentences. Choose every word carefully. Put aside your first draft, wait a few hours and look at what you wrote again. Are you saying precisely what you want to say precisely how you want to be saying it? If not, re-draft and revisit several hours later until your first 2-3 sentences say exactly what you intend. Open your meeting with those sentences.

- Plan your first three sentences in advance. Have your meeting start exactly the way you want it to.



Capture Decisions

Designate someone, in advance whenever possible, to take meeting notes. Only capture decisions and action items, including who will do what by when. When there is a decision, make sure it is worded how you, the meeting leader, want it worded. Have the note taker read the decision back, so that you and everyone present agree on the content of the decision. If this sounds like overkill, it could be. But here the devil truly is in the details. Make sure everyone leaves the meeting with a clear, aligned understanding of what has been decided and accomplished.

- Capture decisions to save time and headaches later.



Call The Question

Make your outcomes explicit. Never assume silence equals consent. If your meeting purpose is a decision, state what you're deciding. If numbers permit, ask everyone individually if he or she is in agreement. If the number of attendees renders that impractical, pause, and say, "so we are all agreed that...". Allow enough time for anyone who wants to dissent to do so. If your meeting purpose is alignment, say, "so we are all aligned that..." Doing so focuses everyone's attention, underlines the meeting outcome, conveys a sense that the meeting was productive and reinforces the meeting result in everyone's mind for the future.

- Call the question. Clarity and alignment are paramount.



Say What's Next

Let people know next steps. For example, if the purpose of the meeting was to identify key initiatives for next year, say, "we will email you the list of initiatives tomorrow. Action plans will be due by the end of next week. We'll reconvene to check progress the first week of next month." The point here is to leave people with a sense of forward momentum – progress towards the objectives for which the meeting was convened. If meeting notes will be distributed, make sure people know who will distribute the notes, and when.

- Say what's next. Always conclude your meeting with a sense of forward momentum.



Finish strong

As the meeting draws to a close, revisit the purpose and intended results. It should be apparent that the meeting has achieved its purpose. When everyone acknowledges that, it reinforces every person's sense of his or her time having been well spent. If the purpose, in whole or in part, has not been realized, saying so maintains the integrity of the meeting and preserves your credibility. Sometimes even the best-planned meetings aren't successful. Should that happen, it is best that you as the meeting leader point that out.

- Finish strongly. Validate that the purpose of the meeting has been realized. Last but not least, thank people for their time and attention.