

Five Tips for Better Meetings

THE ADVANTAGE

1. Know the purpose of your meeting. Is it about solving a tactical, short-term problem, or a critical strategic issue? Are participants meant to brainstorm, debate, offer alternatives, or just sit and listen? Don't let your meeting devolve into a combination of all of these, leaving people confused about what is going on and what is expected of them.

2. Clarify what is at stake. Do participants understand the price of having a bad meeting? Do they know what could go wrong if bad decisions are made? If not, why should they care?

3. Hook them from the outset. Have you thought about the first 10 minutes of your meeting and how you're going to get people engaged? If you don't tee up your topic and dramatize why it matters, you might as well invite participants to check-out.

4. Set aside enough time. Are you going to be tempted to end the meeting before resolution has been achieved? Contrary to popular wisdom, the mark of a great meeting is not how short it is, or whether it ends on time. The key is whether it ends with clarity and commitment from participants.

5. Provoke conflict. Are your people uncomfortable during meetings and tired at the end? If not, they're probably not mixing it up enough and getting to the bottom of important issues. Conflict shouldn't be personal, but it should be ideologically emotional. Seek out opposing views and ensure that they are completely aired.

These five tips alone can improve the quality of our meetings, both in terms of the experience itself as well as the outcome. And considering the almost universal lethargy and disdain for meetings, they can transform what is now considered a painful problem into a competitive advantage.