

Dear All

I was at a recent training course and one of the participants asked me about the etiquette of speaking in meetings. Here are my personal lessons:

If you are the presenter in a meeting:

1. Tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them and in the end tell them what you have told them.
2. Stick to the time you have been allotted, there is nothing more annoying than people rambling over their allocated time. When leaders who are conducting the meeting do it, then they set a very bad example.
3. You must be clear if you will take questions and interruptions as you go along or will wait till end of your presentation to take questions. Both work depending on your comfort. I have found that taking questions in the end helps you to focus and also people listening to you to focus on what you are saying.
4. Speak to everyone in the room, not just the boss or head of the room. Maintain regular eye contact with all.

If you are attending the meeting:

1. be well prepared, read up everything for the meeting, do not go unprepared, if you go unprepared, then you will swing with the flow or wind and will not add value.
2. Speak if you have something valuable to contribute, do not just do class participation.
3. Listen to the others
4. Reference people if they have made a good point and you are adding to it.
5. Be precise, and brevity will only help you. Write down what you want to say that I find helps a lot.
6. Smart people tend to be quiet till they are asked for their views.
7. Do not repeat what others are saying, you are not a loudspeaker.
8. Many meetings become a sycophantic stream of words, avoid it.
9. Research shows that in a 6 member team meeting, 60 % of the conversation is hogged by 2 people.
10. Listen to people, don't make faces or grimace when others talk, don't send wapp messages to other friends in meeting when you are together in a physical meeting. Sending tips on virtual meetings is fine.
11. Why do people talk a lot in meetings? Do look more like a leader, to sound knowledgeable. There is a cost to letting blabber mouths speak – you don't get collaboration or innovation, both need diversity of thought.

When you are the leader of the meeting

1. Insist on pre read for the meeting, read it, send your comments back. There is nothing worse than a leader coming unprepared despite getting the pre read. Meetings are infinitely more productive when everyone has read the pre read and comes to contribute, not to debate.
2. If you are the leader, watch out, people laugh louder at your jokes, tend to agree with you, tend to go silent when you challenge them essentially they want to stay in your good books.
3. So, you have to challenge people differently, make them think differently so that you get the answers or lay out new pathways.
4. The best meeting leaders apply a light touch they go along as long as the meeting is moving in the desired direction and step in when its off strategy or off the agenda.

5. There are many innovations people have tried – stand up meetings so that the meeting gets over in time and everyone wants to complete the meeting. These are typically Monday morning catch up meetings. Silent meetings so that people write down their ideas on a post it pad, post it on a wall and then each participant doesn't argue the point but writes down the positive or challenge of that point on the board. Meetings where the first fifteen minutes are allocated to reading the pre read. Meetings where there is only a one page or two page memo that's sent to focus the participants.
6. Good leaders watch the body language in the room they watch for the ratio of positive to negative words in the meeting, if you have too much cynicism then better to close the meeting. I have found this to be every effective in one on one or one to two three people, I tend to close the meeting if the other person is not getting the message.
7. Don't try to get 100 pc agreement on any issue, it will not happen. I believe in 60 pc agreement but 100 pc commitment.
8. Always go round the table in the end asking if people have anything to add.
9. Ensure that someone is making notes.

I am sure you are spending at least 25 % of your time in meetings, so, make the most of it if you want to be regarded as a good professional

Feedback welcome

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