
Meeting Skills for Inclusive Moderators

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Who am I?

Founder Frame Shift Consulting

Co-founder and former ED of Ada Initiative

Created and taught the Ally Skills Workshop

Worked at IBM, Intel, Sun, Red Hat, etc.

Served on two boards of directors

Linux kernel/file system developer for 10+ years



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Talk format

Introduction

General meeting hygiene

Roles for good meetings

Advanced tips

Questions & answers

Bad meetings

What are signs of bad meetings for you?

Bad meetings: my list of signs

Some people talk too long

Some people can't get a word in edgewise

Decisions don't get made

Decisions are made but without buy-in

Lots of off-topic discussion

Rudeness and humiliation are common

Takes way too long

Good meetings

Everyone gets to contribute relevant knowledge

Decisions get made with appropriate buy-in

Most discussion is on-topic

Politeness and respect are normal

Meeting ends on time or early

How can you have more good meetings?

Basic meeting hygiene is a good start

Formal meeting roles can make a huge difference

Institutional and cultural support is best

Sometimes, all it takes is just one person with the skills and motivation to run the meeting well!

Other places you can use meeting skills

Unconference sessions

Talking with friends

Important discussions with loved ones

Volunteer work

Collaborating on hobbies

Basic meeting hygiene

Create an agenda and send it out in advance, or otherwise establish clear goals and purpose

Assign action items to specific people

Call out action items separately in the meeting notes

Send out meeting notes within 24 hours

Have explicit plans for following up on action items

What about laptops and phones?

In a well-run meeting, people will be too engaged to use laptops and phones

But in a repeating meeting, people might not notice the meeting has gotten better

After introducing good meeting practices, try asking people to close their laptops for just one meeting (except for the person taking notes)

Meeting roles

1. Moderator
2. Gatekeeper
3. Scribe
4. Timekeeper

Read more:

<http://adainitiative.org/2013/10/02/running-your-unconference-discussions-effectively-adacamp-session-role-cards/>

Credit to Intel's corporate training class on effective meetings

Bad meeting scenarios

Everyone spends half the meeting talking about important but off-topic subjects

Ashley and Leigh spend 10 minutes arguing when they actually agree

No one can agree on any decisions

Ashley decides on a new timeline without giving Leslie a chance to share supply problems

Leigh snubs Ashley several times

Meeting role: Moderator

Keeps the discussion on-topic

Follows the agenda

Guides group to make decisions

Seeks out comment

Steps in when people are behaving badly

End meeting on time

Bad meeting scenarios

Leslie starts speaking and everyone rolls their eyes and settles in for a long boring off-topic rant

Ashley has important data but every time they start speaking, another person interrupts

Leigh has good points and is on-topic but dominates the discussion completely

Meeting role: Gatekeeper

Interrupts people who are speaking too long

Pays attention to who is not getting a chance to speak and invites them to speak

May do work outside the meeting as well as during the meeting

Bad meeting scenarios

Everyone disagrees on what performance targets they set in the meeting

Ashley keeps taking credit for Leigh's ideas

No one can remember the sales figures from last week

Leslie finally got everyone to agree to a difficult decision, but Ashley doesn't remember it the same way

Meeting role: Scribe

Takes notes of major contributions and decisions

Interrupts to clarify points when necessary

Records action items

Sends notes out after meeting

Bad meeting scenarios

The last three agenda items don't get discussed in the meeting for lack of time
- and they are the most important items

The meeting goes way over time and Leigh is late to pick up their kids

Discussion on a topic is rushed for lack of time and important information gets left out of the decision

Meeting role: Timekeeper

Tracks progress towards meeting goals

Estimates time to discuss topics if not already noted in the agenda

Interrupts to remind people of the current time and what is left to do in the meeting

Using meeting roles

Start explicitly assigning roles at the beginning of your meetings

Be wary of tendency to assign women the role of scribe more often than men

One person can take on multiple roles

If the person with that role is speaking, distracted, or not doing a good job, consider filling in temporarily, with respect

Large power differences make filling in harder!

Using meeting roles in meetings you don't control

Most people are grateful when someone starts taking on these roles in a meeting, especially gatekeeper

Start taking on whatever roles are most needed, either implicitly or explicitly

Making a casual suggestion that someone take notes, etc. often works

But sometimes this is seen as a power play against the nominal leader of the meeting

Signals help meeting turn-taking

Signals tell other people "I have something to say" without interrupting

For some groups, eye contact is enough

For other groups, need an explicit signal

Explicit signals: raise a hand, raise a finger, make a list of people who want to speak in order

Optional: two hands for "something relevant now"

When powerful people don't follow rules

Don't confront them if it will harm you

Powerful people need increased self-awareness and self-regulation

Discuss privately outside the meeting or get their boss or someone they trust and respect to talk to them

When people use humiliation, domination, insults

Overt: "That's a stupid idea"

Subtle: "Well, actually" and passive-aggression

Non-verbal: sneers, inattention, ostentatious ignoring

Handle in the meeting or wait till after, depending

Often reflective of systemic problems

More about Frame Shift Consulting

Ally Skills Workshop

Conference incident report workshop

Code of conduct design

Company culture consulting

<http://frameshiftconsulting.com>

Q&A

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<http://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop/>