



Meeting for success

Staff meetings that get long-term results require planning, preparation, skilled execution and consistent follow-up.

By Michael W. Haney

ONE OF THE MAIN goals of any organization is improved employee communication and productivity. While a number of steps can improve these staff skills, conducting a regular, focused and productive staff meeting is an excellent way to improve staff efficiency, team-building and overall facility operations.

A productive staff meeting takes preparation, focus and leadership. To analyze an effective staff meeting, we have separated the meeting into three general parts: meeting preparation, meeting structure and post-meeting follow up.

Meeting preparation

Preparation is possibly the most important element to conducting an effective staff meeting. Managers who do not properly prepare for their meetings will find themselves and their staff losing focus.

When preparing for your staff meeting, you want to first address the 3 Ws: *Who* should attend your meeting? *Where* should you conduct your meeting? *When* should you call your meeting?

Who should attend your meeting? Inviting the right people to attend your meeting is a basic component of meeting preparation. Decide in advance who is important to your discussion, and who can make a positive contribution to the gathering. Guests are welcome, but inform your staff of the guest's presence *before* the meeting begins. Also, guests should be introduced at the beginning of your meeting and should adhere to all meeting policies and procedures.

Where should you conduct your meeting? Staff meetings can be held in a variety of environments, provided the location lends itself to privacy. Make sure the setting provides good lighting, adequate heating/cooling and is free of excessive noise. Also, when possible, encourage face-to-face seating. This leads to improved staff interaction and communication.

When should you call your meeting? When planning meetings, select a time that avoids peak facility operation to avoid unexpected interruptions.

Poll your staff on their preferences. However,

avoid late afternoon or dinner meetings. By the end of the day, your staff will be fatigued and their attention span limited.

Another important element in preparing for the meeting is the agenda. When developing your agenda, follow five key components:

1) Distribute a copy of your agenda to all staff who will be attending. Attempt to do this at least two days in advance to give your staff time to prepare comments and ideas on proposed topics.

2) Ask your staff for suggestions for future agenda topics. This will enhance your staff's feelings of inclusion and worth.

3) Prioritize your agenda and, if possible, assign tentative time limits for discussion.

4) Review actions and directives agreed upon at previous meetings. This will provide time for brief progress reports on ongoing issues and encourage follow-up.

5) Have additional copies of the agenda present at your meeting.

Finally, the role and contribution of the meeting leader is vital to its success. The leader must get the meeting started and set the tempo. In addition, the leader is responsible for encouraging staff interaction, maintaining meeting focus, asking for further explanation or examples, and keeping the meeting moving forward in a timely manner.

Meeting structure and execution

Start on time. Nothing demonstrates a lack of professionalism or encourages future tardiness more than staff meetings that chronically start late. Encourage punctuality. Your and your staff's time is valuable.

Assign a staff person to take detailed notes of the proceedings. These minutes can assist you in creating a follow-up record of all decisions made during the meeting. Rotate this responsibility among those who regularly attend. If you prefer not to take notes, record the meeting and use the tape playback when creating your follow-up report.

During discussions, keep the conversation focused on the topic. Avoid allowing subjects that can misdirect the meeting from being interjected into the discussion. Also, make sure the discussions are constructive. Keep your meeting from deteriorating into a complaint session. Complaints can be

Meetings are a key to staff efficiency, team building and an effective facility.



Meeting

handled in a one-to-one meeting or at a special staff meeting.

Make sure your meetings do not drag on. Budgeting an hour of your staff's time each week should be sufficient to solve problems, discuss issues and inform staff of upcoming events.

Once a decision has been made on an agenda item, the leader should give clear, concise instructions to carry out your directives. Near the end of the meeting, allot time to go around the table to let each staff person comment on issues that they feel are important.

In concluding your meeting, summarize all decisions. This will help ensure there is no miscommunication or confusion among your staff. Also, remind staff of the next meeting time and its location.

Post-meeting follow up

After your meeting has adjourned, attempt to generate a follow-up memo to circulate among

staff who attended. Include a summary of all decisions that were made, as well as a brief overview of all important items that were discussed. List contact persons if someone is seeking additional information.

Try to distribute your follow-up memo within one day of your meeting. Also, you can follow up on a directive by briefly discussing its progress with the staff person accountable for its implementation. This will demonstrate your interest, while also giving the staff person the opportunity to ask your advice and opinions.

Staff meetings when properly planned, executed and followed up on can be an effective and valuable team-building and information-sharing resource. Efficient staff meetings use your and your staff's time to its fullest, and also improve your staff's attitude, motivation level, efficiency and productivity. □

Michael W. Haney is president of The Firm Health & Wellness Group, Nashville, Tenn. He can be contacted at 615 662-9870.

Pricing

Continued from page 38

creases. Monthly dues vary for an individual, couple or family, and masters (age 55+) have a category of their own with a \$25 enrollment fee plus monthly dues. Clubfit's other membership options include a personal training package for a \$250 flat rate and a non-prime-time, 18-month commitment for a \$25 initiation fee plus monthly dues.

Similarly, the latest restructuring at Healthtrax added choices to the clubs' membership options and acknowledged that consumers prefer not to pay for services they will never use. New England Health and Racquet clubs now offer the choice of paying for use of the fitness center and aerobics classes, the racquet sports facilities or the entire club with all the amenities. At the same time, Healthtrax facilities have responded to a demand for lower initial outlay by offering a deferment on monthly dues for two months, with a \$129 down payment.

Both Clubfit and Healthtrax are doing what they can to make it worthwhile to sign a long-term agreement. According to Caro, this is one way clubs can exert some control over the consumer. He maintains that "pricing is a device that owners use to tell the marketplace what they want it to do." In other words, if the market is demanding lower enrollment fees and monthly payment options, the owners answer with the yearly contracts and by telling the consumer they want a commitment. Depending on the message they want to give, some clubs may not offer discounts even if the dues are paid upfront, Caro says, because paying monthly brings some emotional commitment to the scenario.

Lombardi from Healthtrax makes this analogy: The person who buys a new home weight system works out diligently for a couple of months. "But once the pain of the sale is gone, the thing starts to

gather cobwebs," he says. A person who buys a club membership outright may feel the pain of dropping a lot of cash for two or three months and will visit the club regularly. More often than not, though, the commitment wanes and attendance is sporadic. However, the person who receives a credit card statement every four weeks showing fees paid to the club tends to recommit to working out on a monthly basis, Lombardi says.

Aero-Fitness Health Center, a corporate wellness center in Oklahoma City, Okla., inspired commitment from its members through a different sort of pricing method. The club, which serves the Federal Aviation Administration and other government employees, offered a sliding monthly fee to members who signed up in the center's first year of operation. "We promoted the sliding fee as a first-year benefit and as a way to say thanks to those who joined us that year," says Tom Conroy, the center's fitness director.

FAA employees travel frequently, and the sliding fee was designed to encourage continued membership even if it meant being absent from Oklahoma City for two or three months at a time, Conroy says. After a \$25 initiation fee, the monthly dues started at \$15. The dues decreased each month of the first year and bottomed out at \$12. The 1,000-member club now offers \$18 monthly rates with no discounts.

Clubs ultimately have to make pricing decisions based on what works for the market in their area. It's prudent to keep in mind, though, that benefitting from a fitness club takes work on the part of the consumer — he/she must be committed to actually perform the workout. And most Americans expect to be paid for their work. At health clubs that might mean through reduced enrollment fees, payment options or added services once inside the club. □

Pricing decisions must be based on what works in the local market.