



**Athletics Directors Association**

# DIADA

## CORNER

### ■ Structuring Good Meetings

Meetings. Every week is jammed with them. Staff, vice presidents', game staging, coaches', planning, fund-raising, board, problem solving and meetings to plan meetings.

Meetings seem innocuous, but are expensive when considering the cost of the assembled personnel, their travel time (even if it's just across campus) and the time taken away from other duties. A recent Associated Press survey found that 79 percent of American workers identified meetings as the biggest wastes of time in their crowded workdays.

However, good meetings are valuable tools as they are one of the most effective ways to build camaraderie, facilitate a productive exchange of creative ideas and planning strategies to accomplish complex tasks. The secret to effective meetings is managing them for results.

#### Step-by-Step Approach

The first step is having a clear purpose and defining goals. Define the meeting's objective and then determine who needs to attend to accomplish it. Invite only the people necessary to fulfill the task. Not only will a smaller group speed things along, but people also appreciate not having their time occupied unnecessarily. For more formal meetings, set an agenda and distribute it beforehand. Include background information that will help make the time spent together more productive.

Schedule meetings early in the day to harness participants' creativity while they are fresh and ensure attendance, because attendees will not be saddled with problems at their own offices. Select and prepare the meeting room for maximum comfort.

A room that is brightly lit and cool will help keep people from becoming drowsy. Connect computers to projectors and troubleshoot before participants arrive. Test conference-calling equipment. Know what to do if the equipment malfunctions or, if in a hotel or conference facility, how to contact the on-call AV specialist. Thoroughly test the sound equipment, including the microphones, and adjust volume levels. Tape electrical cords (especially those around the podium) to the floor for safety.

If the meeting is formal or will involve unfamiliar people, prepare tabletop name cards that are large enough to be read across the table. The chair is responsible for introducing people and telling them where to sit. Assigning seats provides the opportunity to strategically seat people together or to tactfully keep adversaries separated. The chair also takes the seat of authority at the end of the table, facing the room's entrance, with the second most important person present seated to the chair's right.

Begin the meeting on time and do not interrupt its progress by stopping the proceedings to fill in latecomers. Bring those who are tardy up to date after adjournment. This respects those who arrived on time and sends a subtle signal to latecomers to be on time in the future. Do not allow phone calls or interruptions and politely request that cellular phones be turned off.

Set the tone and establish control by delivering a crisp welcome and very brief overview. Stick to the agenda and guide the conversation to keep things moving. Limit circuitous discussion and disagreements and do not let the meeting disintegrate into chitchat, bickering or aimless rambling. Settle differences by taking a vote, or if an issue cannot be

resolved, assign the subject to a subcommittee for further study.

As chair, see to it that people speak in turn and that everyone has a chance to contribute. Call on quiet people to encourage their participation and tactfully cut off a windy person's lengthy remarks, especially when they are inappropriate or off the subject.

Take meeting minutes and distribute them before the next meeting. Minutes serve as a reminder of who promised to do what by when. End on time.

#### Manners for Attending Formal Meetings

Arrive on time, prepared for the topics to be discussed by reviewing any background materials that were distributed in advance. For those making remarks or a presentation, plan and rehearse what you will say. Have papers and relevant materials neatly organized in a folio or briefcase.

Guests or newcomers to the group should introduce themselves to the meeting chair or planner who should indicate seat location. If not, ask before taking a seat. Briefcases should be placed on the floor beside the chair (never on the meeting table). Introduce yourself to others and give your business card to the secretary so that your name and title can be accurately recorded in the minutes.

If making a presentation that requires computer or audio-visual equipment, arrive early to test it. Respect others by confining formal remarks to the amount of time assigned.

*Thanks for this column to Jim Harris, director of athletics at the University of Alabama Huntsville and a member of the Division II Athletics Directors Association Executive Committee.*