

CO-MISSION: PLANTING

Better Meetings and Delegation

	YES	NO
1 Are your meetings dull and uninspiring?	☐	☐
2 Do team members question the usefulness of meetings?	☐	☐
3 Are critical issues avoided or overlooked during meetings?	☐	☐
4 Do you wonder if team members are holding back during meetings?	☐	☐
5 Do team members complain about having to attend meetings?	☐	☐
6 Do you find that meetings end without resolution of critical issues?	☐	☐
7 Do you discuss administrative, tactical and strategic topics during the same meetings?	☐	☐
8 Are important discussions cut short because of time constraints?	☐	☐
9 Is your team reluctant to go off-site more than once a year to review the state of the organization and business?	☐	☐
10 Do team members seem disengaged during meetings?	☐	☐

If you answered **NO** to all of these questions, congratulations! You have one of those rare teams that has mastered the art of meetings.

If you answered **YES** to 1-4 of these questions, you could probably improve your organization's decision-making and overall effectiveness by making a few adjustments to the structure and content of your meetings.

If you answered **YES** to 5 or more of these questions, your meetings are probably causing you to waste considerable resources, both human and financial, and creating confusion within your organization. You should consider making significant changes in the content and structure of your meetings.

'Bad meetings exact a toll on human beings who must endure them... Bad meetings... generate real human suffering in the form of anger, lethargy, and cynicism. And while this certainly has a profound impact on organizational life, it also impacts people's self-esteem, their families, and their outlook of life'
Patrick Lencioni, *Death by Meeting*, p253

'If someone were to offer me one single piece of evidence to evaluate the health of an organization, I would not ask to see its financial statements, review its product line, or even talk to its employees or customers; I would want to observe the leadership team during a meeting... Bad meetings are the birthplace of unhealthy organizations, and good meetings are the origin of cohesion, clarity and communication... 'There is no better way to have a fundamental impact on an organization than by changing the way it does meetings'
Patrick Lencioni, *Death by Meeting*, p173-4

That's a big claim. If it's even half true we need to pay attention to this area.

- Meetings don't have to be boring
- Meetings don't have to be frustrating
- Meetings don't have to be a waste of time

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The most important thing to say is that you need meetings.

- For being a leader – the whole point of being a leader is that you shift focus from your personal contribution to leading, encouraging and releasing the potential of others
- For communication – in all directions (leader to team, team to leader, within team), all levels (information, vision, feedback) – information retention increases when people are physically in the room hearing the communication compared to email or even video¹
- For planning and decision making together (Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 20:18)
- For culture building – ‘where values are established, discussed and lived’²
- For spending time in the Word and prayer together as a leadership team

Six Pre-Meeting Questions

Matt Fuller gives these six questions that need answering before the meeting.

1. Why are you having it at all? – motivation, need, urgency
2. What are you discussing & deciding? – agenda, substance
3. Who needs to be there? – getting the right people round the table – this is really key!
4. Where are you having it? – atmosphere
5. When are you holding it? – energy levels
6. How frequently and how long? – realism

In his book, ‘Death by Meetings’ Lencioni suggests that there are two main problems with our meetings:

1. A lack of drama
2. A lack of contextual structure

Lack of Drama

1. Find the hook: Think feature film. Trailer: Explain why this meeting and what you’re about to discuss and decide actually matters. First 10 minutes: Put the most controversial issue up front.
2. Mine for conflict: It ought to be the case that intelligent people disagree and resolving those issues is what will make a meeting productive, engaging and fun. Don’t be satisfied with superficial agreement. Keep pressing down to find the disagreement and then build up from there.
3. Real time permission: ensure that you encourage the exchange of ideas and critique.

Lack of contextual structure ---- Four Types of Meeting

Lencioni proposes four types of meetings for teams.³ At first this seems a bit overwrought but then you realise that we probably have most of these sorts of meetings already – but it’s worth noticing what sort of meetings we’re having and making the most of them.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4641615/>.

² Patrick Lencioni.

³ This is not so applicable to Sunday service and prayer meetings though there may be some general things to take away in terms of the ideas of having a clear purpose, drama and structure.

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Type of Meeting	Time Required	Purpose & Format of Meeting	Description of Meeting	Challenges
The Daily Check in	5-10 mins	Share daily schedules and activities. Provides a quick forum for ensuring that nothing falls through the cracks on a given day and that no one steps on anyone else's toes. Helps to eliminate the need for unnecessary and time consuming email.	Team members get together, standing up, for about five minutes every morning to report on their activities that day. (Not always possible in ministry but might translate to a daily Google handout or a pre-event prayer time.)	Getting people to stick with it initially in the same place at the same time so that it become routine Keeping it to five minutes; if it gets too long stick the issues in the weekly tactical
The Weekly Tactical	45-90 mins	Review weekly activities and metrics, resolve tactical obstacles and issues of immediate concern, and bring clarity	Run with discipline and similar structure each time: ⁴ 1) Lightening round (60 second reports), 2) Progress report (4-6 indicators), 3) Draw up agenda and address 4) Park strategic stuff, 5) Summarise actions, 6) Make sure people own the communication of them	Getting full attendance. Coming with open mind. Not digressing in lightening round or progress report. Keeping it to 90 minutes. Postpone strategic discussions ⁵
The Monthly Strategic	2-4 hours	Discuss, analyze, brainstorm, and decide upon critical issues affecting long term success	Limit to one or two topics. Prepare and do research. ⁶ Engage in good conflict.	Failure to schedule enough time. ⁷ Too many items on the agenda. Insufficient preparation and research beforehand. Fear of conflict
The Quarterly Off-Site Review	1-2 days	Review strategy, 'industry' trends, 'competitive' landscape, key personnel, team development	Get out of office Focus on work Limit social activities Don't overstructure or overburden the schedule	Don't overburden and over structure the meetings. They're for work not for play. Don't invite outsiders unless they are trusted by the team

⁴ See the work sheet on the following page.

⁵ Capture these as 'Potential Strategic Topics' and park them for now. There isn't time to discuss strategic issues in sufficient depth in a weekly 1 hour meeting. Complex topics need brainstorming, analysis and preparation with trends and evidence. We shouldn't be making changes to our basic strategy on the basis of urgent crises.

⁶ Jeff Bezos requires Amazon meetings begin with 30 min silence as participants read carefully crafted six page memos.

⁷ Ordinarily it takes 45 minutes to get to the heart of the issue.

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WEEKLY TACTICAL MEETING GUIDE

DATE _____

I. LIGHTNING ROUND NOTES [60 sec, top 3 items on plate]	II. SCOREBOARD REVIEW [Progress report] <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 60%;"></td><td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40%;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></td><td style="border: 1px solid black;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></td><td style="border: 1px solid black;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></td><td style="border: 1px solid black;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></td><td style="border: 1px solid black;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;"></td><td style="border: 1px solid black;"></td></tr> </table>																		
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V. DECISIONS/ACTIONS	VI. CASCADING MESSAGES [What, who, when]																		



What that doesn't include:

Personal engagement

- Greetings – cf. Paul's letters – appreciation, genuine concern, people focus
- "How are you doing... really?"
- Might mean adding extra time to the lightening round to get personal updates

Word & Prayer

- Add into every level in increasing quantities – e.g. reading a verse in a daily check in, a 5-15 minute devotion at the beginning of a weekly tactical, half an hour at a monthly strategic, 3 substantial talks at an off-site.
- Word at the beginning, prayer at the end

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So an adapted work sheet could look like this:

WEEKLY TACTICAL MEETING GUIDE

DATE _____

— WORD —

I. LIGHTNING ROUND NOTES [60 sec, personal & family] [60 sec, top 3 items on plate]

II. SCOREBOARD REVIEW [Progress report]

III. TACTICAL AGENDA ITEMS

ORDER	TOPIC
_____	_____
ORDER	TOPIC
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IV. POTENTIAL STRATEGIC TOPICS [Not for now]

TOPIC

TOPIC

TOPIC

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TOPIC

V. DECISIONS/ACTIONS

VI. CASCADING MESSAGES [What, who, when]



— PRAYER —

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Four biblical marker posts for meetings

1 Corinthians 12: We need one another

- Cultivate a culture where there is no hierarchical power-play but rather a recognition of our unity in union with Christ and a sense of being on the same side
- Ensure that the contribution of every part of the body is valued, and particularly the 'weaker parts' recognised as indispensable
- Recognise the importance of different gifts within the team and let them play to their strengths – e.g. the analyser for finding the problems, the innovator/visionary for coming up with blue sky ideas, the encourager for keeping us all motivated
- Key task of meeting leadership is to get everyone speaking and contributing

1 Corinthians 13: We need love

- If I have great reports or great analysis or great comments but not love then I am a clanging gong
- If the discussion and decisions and action points are not motivated by love then they are worthless
- Cultivate a culture of loving discourse and loving organisational drive
- Ensure there is no interruption of speakers, no rudeness, no point scoring, no forceful insisting on a personal agenda
- An atmosphere of grace and love produces the [psychological safety](#) necessary for people to be vulnerable, venture ideas, disagree, admit failure. Where this sort of safety and trust is not present then the real meeting will happen outside the meeting which means wasted time and a toxic culture

1 Corinthians 14: We need to build up

- Understanding is important – ensure everyone understands what is being said at every point, discourage jargon or vague waffle, introduce and summarise sections
- Preparation is important – esp. all the contributions that need to be brought
- Discernment is important – corporate weighing of ideas
- Order is important – timing, people not interrupting one another

1 Corinthians 15: We need the gospel front and centre

- Let the gospel be the test of all our decisions
- Let the gospel rule our conduct and manner towards one another in the meeting
- Let the gospel motivate us towards hard work (v10)
- Let the gospel motivate us towards actually getting things done (v58)
- This might mean:
 - In the introductory devotion
 - Remind of the gospel when the heat of discussion rises too high
 - Remind of the gospel when the discussion strays into irrelevance, irreverence or confusion
 - Remind of the gospel when we're starting to lose a sense of proportion – 'first importance'
 - Remind of the gospel when we are trying to judge the merits of ideas
 - Pray gospel-shaped prayers at the beginning, middle and end

Seven practical tips for effective meetings⁸

1. Know why you're getting everyone together and tell us
 - a. Be clear yourself what the purpose of this meeting is. What sort of meeting is it – tactical, strategic or vision?
 - b. This matters for your own motivation and excitement for a meeting. If you've reminded yourself why you're having this meeting the odds are you'll engage with it and be excited at what's about to happen. That's a great vibe to take into the meeting. If you can't think of a reason why you're having this meeting, then don't have it.

⁸ Based on 'Meetings are Where Real Work is Done' in *Wisdom in Leadership*, Craig Hamilton

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- c. Communicate the purpose of the meeting before the meeting and at the start of the meeting. It'll help with motivate people to attend and motivate them to engage. It's not an important meeting simply because you say it is, it's been allocated some time and there are lots of people there. That just makes it inconvenient, expensive and crowded. And that's not a great vibe to have in the meeting. Help people see why they're there and what they're there for.
2. Who's meeting is this?
 - a. Who's driving? Who's responsible for a successful meeting?
 - i. Where everyone talks
 - ii. Where there's love
 - iii. Where it's constructive
 - iv. Where we remember the gospel
 - b. If the meeting is yours then you set the ground rules and you call the fouls:
 - i. We going to treat one another with respect
 - ii. We won't interrupt one another and talk over them
 - iii. We're going to listen attentively and not be distracted
 - iv. We're not going to belittle one another's ideas
 - c. Also – try to keep some lightness to the meeting – sometimes humour is not appropriate because we'll be discussing some very weighty, sensitive or sad issues but make sure we don't take ourselves too seriously. Laughter can be a great tension reliever!
3. Separate information, tactical and strategic
 - a. This is Lencioni's point. Split what you want to discuss into three separate categories. Where possible have them in different meetings but at least have them distinct in the meeting so you're not constantly flicking between the different levels.
 - i. FYI: these do not require discussion but are information sharing or updates on progress
 - ii. Tactical: these are specific items that have to do with the specific nuts and bolts of what you're doing, deciding who's reading on Sunday, who's stewarding, what's the running order and so on. It's detail. And someone needs to sweat the small stuff.
 - iii. Strategic: these are not so much about the specific details of what you're doing but the broader view. It's 'should we do evangelistic events?' not 'who should speak at our evangelistic event?'
4. Head for a decision and then make sure we're all clear on it
 - a. Work towards a desired end point. What are you after from the meeting? Discussion is fine. But it probably shouldn't be open ended. You need to head towards a decision.
 - b. Once you think the meeting has made a decision then you need to state what that decision is so that everyone can agree that that's the decision. Make sure it's written down straight away! No matter how clear you think it is, half the people in the room will not be clear or will have forgotten what the decision by tomorrow.
5. Clarify who is going own the what and when
 - a. In addition to clarifying the decision, you also need to clarify who will own each item. Who is responsible for making it happen and when?
 - b. E.g. if we're going to find four people to lead service next term, who is going to own that, when are they going to make sure it's done by and when are they going to report back by? What are they going to do to prepare them and train them for that? What assessment will ensure that they're suitable? When does it need to be completed by?
6. Keep everyone involved
 - a. We don't want a prolonged one-on-one discussion where others in the meeting begin to check out and start checking emails or Facebook. If it needs to be a conversation between two people then they need to continue it outside the meeting and not require everyone else to listen in. It's entirely appropriate for them to do so and report back at a later date.

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- b. You need to keep people in the meeting involved and engaged and glad that they're there. You can't have too many feeling that their time would be better spent elsewhere.
7. Summarise what you accomplished
 - a. Before ending the meeting read back the decisions that have been made, who is responsible for what and when they'll be delivered or reported back on.
 - b. It's worth double checking that everyone is on the same page. This ensures that the daydreamers are on board. It's like a sermon – "If you missed all of that I just want you to go home this."
 - c. It also reinforces the value of the meeting. It was worth being at. Stuff got done. Decisions were made.

Something on decision-making:

- Involve others in clarifying the issues and options – especially if the issue is complex and the implications of the decision are high impact, high cost or involve a change of direction
- But involving others is no guarantee of a good decision - HBR found that most managers overvalue their ideas by 42%. Front line employees undervalue theirs by 11%. This suggests it's very good to hear the ideas of those you lead. But the strange thing is what happens when people are in a group setting. People go from overvaluing their ideas, on average, by 4% versus to, when they're in a team setting, overvaluing their ideas by 41%!
- This reinforces the importance of getting written contributions before the meeting.
- Also the importance of encouraging debate and valuing opposing ideas (versus groupthink)
- Give clarity on how decision will be made / who is responsible – majority / leader / consensus
- Give clarity on importance of group ownership – "When we come to a decision that will be our group decision and we're all going to own that and advocate it and defend it when we're outside this room."

Delegation

Why we don't:

- They might do it worse
- They might do it better than me!
- I enjoy this ministry
- It takes time to delegate – hard work

Why we should:

- Multiplies ministry – if it's worth doing then it's worth doing badly – there will be a dip in performance but we need to get over perfectionism when it means that people who would have received no ministry end up receiving at least adequate ministry
- Grows people – develops leaders
- Builds trust relationships
- Builds motivation and momentum
- Fosters creativity – people end up doing things differently, coming up with new, fresh, better ideas

And so conversely, if we're unwilling to delegate, or delegate but then take things back off people when we see the first signs of it not going as well as it could:

- Restricts ministry
- Stunts growth and fails to develop new leaders
- Breaks down trust – "He doesn't trust me to do anything"
- Demotivates, breaks momentum, breeds bitterness, lethargy and cynicism
- Cramps creativity – everyone has to do it exactly like me

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How to delegate well:

- Stewardship delegation: Authority (able) & Responsibility (accountable)
- Don't micromanage but don't give a blank sheet either – give people:
 - Results (what, why) – this is what we're aiming at
 - Guidelines (when, where, how) – this is roughly how we want to get there – ministry DNA, ground rules
 - Resources – this is the budget and the people you can involve/ask
 - Review – we'll meet up on this date and reflect on how it went

Break it down:

Craig Hamilton discusses how crucial the hand-over is, particularly with a significant area of responsibility – e.g. a youth group or a social media account. Break down the role into different tasks and decisions and 'what ifs' and let them know how much freedom they have in the different areas. Don't assume it's obvious!

Just do it No need to report	E.g. simple maintenance tasks
Just do it But report regularly on how it's going	E.g. attendance, spiritual growth, slow burn pastoral issues, team dynamics
Just do it But let me know as soon as you've done it	E.g. physical or pastoral first aid in a crisis
Don't do it Until we've talked first	E.g. posting a particular sort of publicity, making a radical change to the strategy

Further Reading

Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom In Leadership* & [this video](#)

Matt Perman, *What's Best Next & Unstuck*

Death by Meeting Resources: <https://www.tablegroup.com/books/dbm>

<https://www.ksl-training.co.uk/free-resources/chairing-meetings/tips-for-chairing-meetings/>

<https://fiec.org.uk/resources/are-your-meetings-smart>