

The Five Reasons for a Meeting – by David Allen

There are five reasons to have a meeting. Each may be a perfectly fine reason. Make sure everyone at your meeting knows and agrees with which of these you are there to accomplish.

1. Give information

“Hello everyone. I’ve brought you all together today to let you know what’s been going on about the pending lawsuit. I’d like you to leave here today understanding what’s going on, and with as much background as you need to be able to answer questions that may arise from our customers.”

2. Get information

“Thanks for coming. We’ve invited you all here to find out from everyone what we should be aware of that’s going on in your division relative to the new product roll-out. We want to know what’s happening at all levels in the organization about this, so we can make some adjustments in our plans accordingly.”

3. Develop options

“We’d like to spend this afternoon surfacing, formulating, and exploring as many possible ways to deal with the problem we’ve just uncovered in the new system implementation. We want to make sure we’ve got everyone’s perspectives and all the possible alternatives formulated.”

4. Make decisions

“We’ve brought you all together this morning to present to you the three proposed approaches to launching our new product, and get a consensus decision on which one to pursue.”

5. Warm magical human contact

“There are 3 agenda items we would like to cover today. And though we could have done this by email, we wanted to have an opportunity to bring the new team together in one place, and get some time to get to know each other between the lines...”

You may often have more than one of these agendas-sometimes even all five. “Today I’m going to share some information with you, and get some information from you as well. We’re then going to explore some possible approaches to the situation, and then decide our best course of action. Meanwhile it will give us a chance to get to know each other a little more as real people...”

Pretty common sense stuff. Right. But, ever sat in a room with someone trying to make a decision, someone else just wanting to do some brainstorming about some possibilities, some people just wanting to get to know who they’re working with, and someone else just wanting to get some information about the situation? And they all wind up wanting to kill each other?

It’s very valuable to get clarification and agreement on the front end, as to which of the five reasons for a meeting you have going on.

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