



Death by Meeting

Ideas for Leading More Effective Meetings

The culture of your church will come to mirror your meetings. Mediocre, passionless meetings bring with them a mediocre passionless organization.

Are the meetings you lead productive, compelling and energizing?

If you didn't have to go to meetings would you like your job more?

Do you look forward to your board meeting?

Would your board members rather spend two hours in a meeting or go to a movie?

"If we hate meetings, can we be making good decisions and successfully leading our organizations? I don't think so. There is simply no substitute for a good meeting – a dynamic, passionate and focused engagement – when it comes to extracting the collective wisdom of a team. The hard truth is, bad meetings almost always lead to bad decisions, which is the best recipe for mediocrity."

Most meetings are lethargic, unfocused and passionless. However it should not be this way.

When properly utilized meetings are actually time savers.

Structure Your Board for Effectiveness

Governance will rarely be achieved by a board structured for management. We do need both functions in a church. How might you separate these functions?

Is your meeting a small group designed for decisions or a large group designed for information sharing? There is a place for both types of meetings however when we mix these meetings up we get frustration.

Have board members clearly trained on what it means to be part of the board and the need for self-leadership especially in regard to the character they bring to a board meeting.

Prepare Well

- Be very intentional in how you shape the agenda. Ensure priority is given to governance issues if you are in a board that is both governance and management.
- Ensure Agenda items are ready to be presented with expectations of what decisions are being made.
- Clarify what needs to be dealt with at what level of meeting. E.g. should an issue actually be dealt with by that ministry department/leader rather than the whole board and just reported on.
- Have real data about the problems everyone knows exist.
- Encourage leaders to report well with concise information that is pertinent to the whole board. Reports need to be prepared as opposed to on the spot ramblings. Issues that might arise out of the report need to be thought through and if discussion is needed should be on the agenda. Some churches use a reporting template.
- Send agenda out early with necessary background readings and points of pre meeting prayer.
- Use assessment tools or discussion aids to help clarify what issues are. Using a tool separate to your ideas can make it easier to generate discussion and be a reflection of the wider meeting rather than one person's opinion. E.g. Quick life-cycle assessment.
Change readiness questionnaire
Seven habits questions.

Make Space for Board Members to Engage in Community

Structure board meetings around a meal from time to time

Make time to share with and pray for each other. Task oriented people will not like this however may see it differently if they know 'community' is the task at this point.

Your Devotional Time is Crucial

Remind people of the mission and why they are doing what they do

Ideas:

- Pray for new people in the congregation
- Pray in various places
- Shift where you hold your board meetings to promote creativity
- Use stories to illustrate what the vision and mission look like

How does the Holy Spirit fit into group decision making? What place does prayer play throughout the meeting?

Clarify What Is Expected

Clarify are people meant to be debating, voting, brainstorming, weighing in or just listening.

Distinguish between the various types of meetings their purpose, format and timing.

- Action Groups – Specific Task
- Decision Making Groups
- Information Trading
- Conflict Resolution
- Governance Meetings

People need to know early in the meeting what is at stake and how it will progress.

Illustrate the dangers of making a bad decision

Highlight a threat that is looming

Appeal to the mission

People are looking for a reason to care

Some want informative and quick. Others think it should be interactive and strategic. Others would like to step back, take a breath and talk meaningfully about company culture. Others want to make clear decisions and move on. All are right and so need to know what is expected on a given issue.

Conflict is Your Friend

Conflict makes a meeting great.

Most leaders of meetings seem focused on avoiding tension

Leaders must look for legitimate reasons to provoke, and uncover relevant, constructive ideological conflict. By doing so they'll keep people engaged, which leads to more passionate discussions and ultimately to better decisions.

The truth is, the only thing more painful than confronting an uncomfortable topic is pretending it doesn't exist. And I believe far more suffering is caused by failing to deal with an issue directly – and whispering about it in the hallways – than by putting it on the table and wrestling with it head on.

“Consensus is usually not achievable. The likelihood of six intelligent people coming to a sincere and complete agreement on a complex and important topic is very low.”

Instead

Have a passionate, unfiltered, messy, proactive discussion that ends when the leader of the team decides all the information had been aired. At that point, if no one had made a compelling enough argument for making a decision, the leader breaks the tie.

Once the decision is made, everyone supports it. That's why it is critical that no one hold anything back during the discussion.

Retreats

A regular leadership retreat can be a great time for building community and engaging issues of church life at a deeper level.

What exercises and resources will help people engage?

What exercises resources will help people grow in understanding church life?

Board Training:

How do you train your board in church health thinking?

- Articles and books
- DVD segments with discussion questions
- Worksheets
- Activities
- Guest

Topics for Training might include:

- Life-Cycles
- Discipleship
- Purposes of the Church
- Self-Leadership
- Change Management
- Vision

Books:

Patrick Lencioni – *Death by Meeting*, Jossey-Bass, 2004

Mack Tennyson - *Making Committees Work*, Ministerial Association

Michael Anthony – *The Effective Church Board*, Baker Books, 1993.