

10 Commandments for Effective Meetings

I. Thou shalt take meetings seriously.

Too many members don't and they show up late, leave early, forget to silence their cell phones, doodle and don't pay attention or conduct side conversations with a neighbor. Set your expectations as a group – conduct, procedures and professionalism. Be sure to discuss what is not acceptable.

II. Thou shalt always know what time it is.

Everyone's time is valuable. Give a starting and an ending point to each meeting. That allows your members to focus on the meeting instead of wondering if they will make it out in time for their next activity. It is important that you, as the leader, end at the stated time. By doing this, you keep your meeting focused, effective and productive.

III. Thou shalt not forget the main reason for meeting.

There are three main reasons to hold a meeting – communication, administration and decision-making. If you are calling a meeting for any other purpose, look for an alternative that may save time.

IV. Thou shalt remember the golden rule of meetings.

Criticize in private and praise in public. Criticism is very destructive and can bring a meeting to a halt. It takes away the focus of the meeting. However, praise is best given in a public setting such as your meetings. Create a section on your agenda to recognize the good work of your members.

V. Thou shalt not convene meetings at unreasonable hours.

Late-night meetings are not very effective. Members are tired, thinking about finishing homework or what reality television show they are missing. Schedule meetings at a reasonable hour during the day or at least in the early evening so you keep you members' focus.

VI. Thou shalt always have an agenda.

An agenda lets your members know what to expect, how long the meeting will be, provides an order to the meeting and spreads responsibility among the group. Your agendas don't always have to be boring, either. Liven agendas up with quotes, cartoons, jokes, or even a trivia question.

VII. Thou shalt keep personal and business separate.

Meetings are a great way to bring your group together every week. But once the meeting begins, it should be about business. Get the work done first, play second. This applies to socializing, but it also applies to relationships, to disagreements and to personalities. To quote Michael Corleone, "It's not personal, Sonny. It's strictly business." (Internet Movie Database)

VIII. Thou shalt distribute minutes within a reasonable timeframe following the meeting.

Minutes are a tool that can provide a summary of actions, decisions and assignments. Minutes provide a historical perspective on past actions that set precedent for future decisions.

IX. Thou shalt not convene the whole group if a matter can be resolved by a few.

Sometime it isn't necessary to pull the whole group together to resolve an issue. Focus on the people who need to be there. The others will appreciate your sensitivity to their time. If you use this method, however, remember to update the rest of the members through e-mail or at the next full meeting.

X. Thou shalt eliminate the meeting when there is not the need.

If there is nothing to meet about, don't hold the meeting. If you just want to get people together, plan a social activity. If your meetings began around an issue and the issue is resolved, it is okay to no longer meet.

Adapted from PaperClip Communications, Carter McNamara, and
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Campus Activities