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# Six Tips for Running a Better Meeting

By Christopher Earley

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*You have a meeting to make a decision, not to decide on a question.* —Bill Gates

Most people don't actually enjoy running or participating in meetings. Not only are meetings often boring, but they also can waste considerable time. Meetings are crucial, however, to ensure that all team members are rowing in the same direction. The better the quality of your meetings, the more your law firm gets done and grows. Regardless of the size of your team, if meetings are done well, they are game changers. If done incorrectly, they are pointless. A well-run meeting can be enormously effective for troubleshooting issues, exploring opportunities, maintaining alignment, protecting and growing culture, and countless other benefits. Because we as lawyers do not learn how to run an effective meeting in law school, I present below six tips to keep in mind to make your meetings as efficient and productive as possible.

An advertisement for BridgeBank's 'U.S. M&amp;A Outlook 2023' report. On the left, a red box contains the text 'SPECIAL REPORT U.S. M&amp;A OUTLOOK 2023' and 'FREE DOWNLOAD' in large white letters. Below this is the BridgeBank logo and the text 'Bridge Bank, a division of Western Alliance Bank. Member FDIC.' In the center, a laptop displays the report's cover. On the right, the BridgeBank logo is shown above a red button that says 'VIEW THE REPORT'.

## 1. Pick a Firm Start Time and End Time (and Stick to Them)

If people are late to the meeting, start the meeting anyway. This shows that people are expected to be on time. Once the meeting starts, set a timer so the meeting does not go longer than planned. This helps keep everyone focused and on track, which avoids detours into unrelated topics that can stretch a meeting out longer than anticipated. Of course, if the meeting has spurred a robust

discussion of ideas, then a meeting should last longer than initially scheduled, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

## **2. Hold Regular, Scheduled Meetings, Not Random Ones**

There is great benefit to having consistent and predictable meetings so that staff gets accustomed to a meeting rhythm. Whatever meetings you run at your office, make sure they are always on the same day and start at the same time because this consistency is important.

## **3. Always Have an Agenda**

The best meetings are those where people know beforehand exactly what will be discussed and/or decided during the meeting. Make sure to share the agenda with all team members prior to the meeting so that everyone is fully prepared to be engaged and contribute productively to the meeting.

## **4. Choose Sitting vs. Standing**

This is important because it sets the tone for the meeting. A sit-down meeting suggests an extended, in-depth dive, whereas a standing meeting signals a quicker, less formal meeting. Be sure to pick the one that aligns most with the meeting agenda.

## **5. Clarify Who, What, and When**

The meeting should always end with a plan to be executed. Rather than leaving it to chance that items discussed during the meeting actually get done, be intentional. Meetings, after all, are a big waste of time and oxygen unless there is a clear plan on who will get what done by which date. Never end a meeting without first deciding these crucially important decisions. This creates among team members an ownership mentality over the work and ensures that the work gets done.

## **6. Listen More, Talk Less**

This applies to all aspects of leadership, and it applies especially to meetings. Sit back and let your staff collaborate and conjure ideas, but don't say anything; just listen to what is being said during

the meeting. Don't pass judgment. Always encourage the free flow of ideas by truly listening. That way, staff will feel comfortable and will share their ideas without being afraid.

These are the meetings I have found success with at our office:

- **Daily huddle.** This is a seven-minute meeting starting at 9:30 am each day where everyone comes to the huddle with three things: (1) biggest challenge yesterday, (2) biggest success yesterday, and (3) goal for today.
- **Biweekly meeting.** This is a 30-minute office-wide meeting that I call the OSI (one small idea meeting). Everyone is tasked with bringing to the meeting one small (or big) idea they feel will help us improve office-wide.
- **Quarterly conversations.** These are one-on-one meetings between myself and a team member where I “take the temperature” to see how the team member is doing and feeling. It is not a review but rather simply a back-and-forth conversation where I do a lot of listening.
- **Annual breakfast.** This is an office-wide yearly meeting in early January where we discuss successes and challenges from the prior year as well as goals for the new year. This is an extremely important meeting that sets the tone for what is expected of everyone in the near year.

Meetings can be a great opportunity to improve your firm. The better the meetings are run, the more buy-in and contributions you will receive from your team. If you want to share how you run your meetings, I would love to hear about it, so please email me a [cearley@earleylawgroup.com](mailto:cearley@earleylawgroup.com).

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