



Inside this issue:

President's Column

Even More to Love About Vegas This Year

2

Legal Update

Prohibited Transactions in Private Settlements?

8

Ownership Advantage

Effective Meetings Can Enhance Ownership Culture

3

Advisory Committee on Administration

Counting Employees and Determining Eligibility

9

New Trade Show Offers New Experience

Innovation Stage, Lounge, More to Be Offered

7

Gwenn Rosenthal Retires

Association Bids Fond Farewell to Stalwart Employee

11

Ownership Advantage

Effective Meetings Can Enhance Your Employee Ownership Culture

By Linshuang Lu, Principal, Praxis Consulting Group Inc.

Meetings often are the bane of our work lives. We groan that we can't get any work done when we spend all our time in meetings. We love to hate them, and yet we haven't figured out how to get rid of them.

In spite of these negative associations, effective meetings are indispensable for building an ownership culture. Meetings can keep employee owners informed and connected, and empower them to contribute ideas and

make decisions that can improve your employee owned company.

Types of Meetings

There is no one formula for determining the right types of meetings for your company. Recurring meetings can be important for strategic thinking, collaboration, coordination, planning, improvement, monitoring, and training. Ad-hoc meetings can be used to problem-solve urgent issues and make decisions as needs arise.

Different types of meetings require different lengths of time. A team of field construction workers may need only a 10-minute daily work coordination meeting, whereas an improvement task force may require a half day to fully explore and discuss an issue.

Company size and geography also influence which types of meetings may work best. A 300 person company spread out across multiple locations may decide to have one bi-annual meeting for everyone, or opt for an annual meeting in which people gather in their own regions. By contrast, a 40-person company in one location might have no problem holding all-staff meetings once a month.

Preparation is Key: Who and Why?

Effective meetings begin before people gather, and start with establishing clear goals. What do you hope to accomplish?

When creating the agenda, think of a goal for each topic. Are you trying to give an update? Do you hope to have a brainstorming discussion? Make a decision?



For recurring meetings, the agenda can be finalized at the beginning of the meeting by the participants. Alternatively, the meeting leader might present an agenda and then ask participants to affirm the plan or add other topics.

Good planning includes being thoughtful about the people who need to attend, the role they will play, and their authority. Gathering people with the right knowledge, experience, or stake in the issues makes a difference.

It also is important to be clear about how decisions will be made. Will the leader of the group make the final decision, based on input from the group? Will the team make the decision together, based on a majority vote?

Beyond the agenda itself, you might have process goals (i.e. how you hope people will interact during and afterwards). Perhaps you hope to get lots of questions, or for people to feel energized afterward and ready to apply what they learned. The meeting should be designed with the aim of accomplishing these goals.

Design the Meeting

For longer or larger meetings, deliberate design will help you achieve success. This means planning key questions, balancing presentations and small and large group exercises, and figuring out how best to gather and summarize participant contributions.

As a general guide, planning should take as much time as the meeting itself, or even longer if the meeting is complex (such as an all-company meeting with multiple breakouts).

For regular or shorter meetings, a few minutes of planning can make a big difference. Sharing a clear agenda in advance lays the foundation for people to participate. A check-in question can get everyone participating right away.

You also may want to prepare an important question or decide which facilitation techniques to use for an important decision. Some people create a standard agenda with these components for regular meetings.

Empowering Facilitation

A good meeting requires one or more designated facilitators who are responsible for following the agenda, managing discussion, ensuring decisions and key points are documented, and moving conversation to the next topic.

Typically, this role is filled by the formal leader of the group, though it does not have to be. Many companies or groups rotate facilitators for meetings, which allows the leader to participate more fully.

A good meeting requires one or more designated facilitators who are responsible for following the agenda, managing discussion, ensuring decisions and key points are documented, and moving conversation forward to the next topic.

The facilitator, who often is a member of the team or committee, must navigate two roles: individual contributor or leader to the group, and manager of the discussion.

Establishing explicit meeting norms sets shared expectations for the group's behavior. Many companies use an established meeting norms list for all their meetings.

Common norms include:

- Step up, step back—in which people are encouraged to step up and share their perspective, or step back if they have already spoken quite a bit.

- Be curious and listen.
- Be present.
- No electronic devices, except for emergencies.

We usually want active participation. When people discuss issues, contribute their ideas, and ask questions, they are more likely to feel excited and committed, and the company is more likely to benefit from their perspectives and expertise.

Practical ways to encourage participation range from an easy check-in question to get everyone's voice in the room, to writing responses on a flip chart, to structured facilitation exercises with more opportunities for response (e.g. individual reflection with documentation on post-it notes, paired or small group discussion, or saying things like "We haven't heard from some people for a while; we'd love to hear your perspectives on this topic.")

Good facilitation requires paying attention to people's body language and energy level. Depending on what is happening, it may be necessary to take a break, acknowledge emotion or conflict, or deviate from the agenda.

It can be hard for one person to do all of this, so other team members should be encouraged to pay attention to participant behavior, and speak up if the meeting needs to take a different direction or be refocused.

The facilitator must monitor progress toward meeting goals and make deliberate course-corrections. For instance, if a team needs to make an important decision, but surprising information requires more time to understand, it may be better to deviate from the original agenda.

That being said, meetings often go off on tangents unrelated to the goals at hand. When this happens, the facilitator should refocus the conversation: "We're getting off topic, let's return to the agenda."

If people are fascinated by the tangent, it can be saved for a future conversation: "It seems like this is an important discussion we need to have. Today's meeting is not the right place to discuss; let's save it for next month's agenda." Some groups use a "parking lot" flipchart where these ideas are recorded for later discussion.

Good meetings also have strong closure. The facilitator should summarize key agreements, decisions, and next steps (along with who is responsible for each).

A quick evaluation in which people are asked to identify what worked and what could be enhanced in the next meeting can provide feedback for continuous improvement.

The Follow-Up Makes the Meeting

Sharing meeting notes and reminding people of next steps helps ensure the meeting's decisions are implemented.

For retreats and larger meetings, it can be valuable to have a formal debriefing (yes, there is irony in a meeting to debrief a meeting), where the planners can discuss what worked well and what could be improved, and can document any lessons and changes for the future.

Communicating with those unable to attend the meeting is an often-overlooked follow-up step. This is especially important after important decisions have been made. Follow-up should happen quickly, in the right way (individual communication, e-mail, etc.). Some companies send out regular updates after certain meetings, or keep meeting notes in a publicly accessible location, to demonstrate transparency and keep people informed.

Virtual Meetings

The principles for effective in-person meetings apply to those conducted virtually, but virtual meetings require stronger facilitation, formality, and preparation. Participants may need to say their name before speaking, and the facilitator may need to call on individuals by name for their contributions.

While insufficient in itself, good technology is necessary: Good speaker phones, working computer cameras, and electronic screen-shares (serving as a flipchart) can make it easier for people to hear, see, and focus during the meeting. Tools like breakout rooms or texting software can increase participation.

Practice and Improve

We sometimes assume that managers, committee chairs, and task force leaders automatically know how to run an effective meeting. People often are thrown into these roles, without formal training, and often with mediocre role models. We would never accept the same poor preparation in financial, operational, or other key processes.

No wonder meetings have such a bad reputation.

Leading effective meetings is a skill that is developed over time. Pay attention to how effective leaders run their meetings. Borrow their techniques. There are plenty of resources on the Internet for helpful facilitation exercises. Practice a lot, and always get feedback afterward.

Making small changes in your company's meetings can make a big difference in tapping into the benefits of employee ownership. Done effectively, meetings help employees truly think, feel, and act like owners.

This article was reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Ownership Culture Committee, Jason Wellman, Senior Relationship Consultant, ESOP Partners. €

Calendar of Deadlines and Important Dates

Sept. 23	Early Bird Registration Ends for Employee Owned 2019
Oct. 1-31	Employee Ownership Month
Nov. 13-15	Employee Owned 2019, the Conference and Trade Show for ESOPs
Dec. 1-4	Leading in an Ownership Setting

To see the full list of .ESOP Association meetings, visit us online at: www.esopassociation.org.