

Four Meetings Every Leader Should Conduct

A recent Harvard Business Review article said that 71% of business meetings are unproductive. Layer on top of that how much time is wasted in those meetings and how much production is lost. Wow! No wonder so many employees are so dissatisfied with their boss and less engaged at work.

A knee-jerk reaction for many is to have fewer meetings but then we hear of communication breakdowns which lead to significant delivery issues which results in – you guessed it – dissatisfied and unengaged employees. What's a leader to do???

(There definitely is a place for looking at every meeting and asking three questions:

1. Did we really need to have this meeting?
2. Did everyone in the room need to attend it?
3. Could we have had this meeting in ½ the time?)

Well, how about having better meetings? Meetings that are not just worthwhile and productive but drive positive results and employees actually say they're glad they attended. These meetings keep lines of communication wide open; they better position employees for success; and they move individuals and teams forward ... without wasting precious time.

From CEOs to mid-level managers to branch managers, here are four meetings every leader needs to deliver with their direct reports:

Observation + Feedback

There are few better ways to build trust with employees than to observe them in action and give them feedback on how they're doing. Too often, leaders give general feedback based on isolated observations – often when a problem is brought to their attention. Not only is that ineffective, it also erodes trust.

Conducting regular, consistent observations allows the leader to see the employee in a variety of situations and coach them on what they did well and what they should improve. They can be very specific in their feedback, spotlighting words they heard and body language they saw – both critical components for driving positive change.

How Often? The easy answer is, “as often as possible”. But reality is that you'll likely have to schedule this weekly – block out 1-4 hours, depending on the size of staff, to conduct observations and try to give the feedback immediately after

How Much Time? Again, it depends, but an observation doesn't need to take more than 5-10 minutes each, plus 1-2 minutes for the feedback

Note: Announce to your direct reports that you'll be doing this and give them details on what you'll be looking for in the observation

Book Ends

An often-overlooked key to success is getting and keeping your team focused on their highest priorities. Unfortunately, staff gets distracted by less important tasks and never gets around to fully devoting time and effort to the things that matter most – this is especially true with member-facing staff who get bogged-down in operational issues and/or become reactive to high volumes of transactions.

As their leader, it's important to try and keep them focused on the activities that'll keep them moving in the direction of meeting the desired outcome. One way to do this is what we call "Book End" meetings. On Monday morning, simply ask your team what their highest priority for the week is and how do they plan on attacking it. Then, on Friday afternoon, circle back with them to see how they did. Make it your routine and they'll come to know that they'll need plans for success and you will hold them accountable to following those plans.

How Often? Every Monday morning and Friday afternoon. If you're in the same building, do this in-person; if not, email and phone work, too.

How Much Time? Sending each email should take less than a minute; so it's 2 minutes per week for each direct report

Note: Once you establish your regimen, you can expect them to automatically send you the emails or report to you instead of you sending out the emails.

Huddles

Chances are you've already heard of huddles and many of you are already doing them. However, there are a lot of different definitions of "huddles" out there. Our definition is a 5-6 minute team meeting that's focused on one or two topics. Many leaders schedule these for specific days each week while others do them more spontaneously throughout the work week.

Whenever you deliver them, huddles can be a great way to get and keep your team focused on a priority, communicate information, and motivate the staff. They have traditionally been used in sales environments where the coach trumpets successes, shares best practices, and encourages certain tactics. Whether you are in a sales environment or not, huddles should be vital aspect of your coaching regimen.

How Often? At least once each week, preferably twice. Mornings seem to best because it can the team focused on the day's objectives and give them a boost of motivation. However, afternoons and end of day can also be very successful.

How Much Time? Five minutes should be your target (for many of you, if you're doing this in the morning, you'll need a hard stop at 9AM anyway.)

Note: After leading a few huddles and setting the standard, the manager can hand off responsibility for them to members of the team – let the staff run the huddles. Set up a schedule, work with each person the first time they do it but then let them own it and take the lead. Your job

is to make sure they are done effectively and this allows you to coach that staff member on meeting your standard.

Team Meetings

Most people think of team meetings when they think of meetings – they’re the most common type ... but often the ones that fall into that “unproductive” category referenced in the HBR study. Many leaders either have these meetings on an infrequent basis and therefore they become hour-long marathons or they’re done every week even when there’s little or no need to meet. In both cases, team meetings have gotten a bad rap.

Done well, team meetings can be highly productive, enjoyable, and inspirational. They can be a great opportunity to bring the team together, especially if they work in disparate locations – goodbuilding and team-bonding. They can be great for idea-sharing, especially when those ideas are proven best practices. Further, they can be efficient because everyone hears the same message at the same time – particularly important when announcing changes.

How Often? Monthly is the target for most leaders. If you’re managing managers, you’ll want to deliver your team meeting a few days prior to their team meeting so information can be quickly passed down. At a C-level, team meetings need to be bi-weekly or even weekly so you can keep your finger on the pulse and promptly course-correct, as needed.

How Much Time? Again, it depends on the type of team you’re leading but it should be a sufficient amount of time to demonstrate the importance of having the meeting. Generally, they should be at least 60 minutes. If people are driving in from long distances, a 2+ hour meeting may be necessary to justify their travel time and expense.

Note: Like huddles, the manager doesn’t need to lead the entire team meeting. Get team members leading parts of it and draw-in outside voices, as appropriate, to add a special flavor to the meeting. Also, general categories are a good idea for your meeting agenda – things like production updates, skill building, and action-planning are good general categories that should be in every team meeting.

Delivering any meeting can expend valuable time and resources from you and your team but they need to be a critical component of any successful coaching regimen. When you do them, you need to do them effectively. Following these steps can be your roadmap for delivering these four types of meetings in a way that optimizes your team and individual performances and keeps employees engaged in your culture.

If your credit union needs help in maximizing the effectiveness of your meetings, our consultants are poised to help. Check us out at www.fi-strategies.com or 636-578-3280 and let’s talk about creating the best meeting regimen for your culture.