

One in a series of articles by

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Connecting With Others: MAKING THE MOST OF MEETINGS

CHECK-IN

Start meetings with a round the table check-in. Check-in isn't a time for story-telling or conversing with each other but rather a time when people can simply say where they're at in the moment. Check-in provides an opportunity for everyone to still themselves and become aware of their own internal experience as well as that of others. "I'm feeling overwhelmed right now." or "I'm feeling very excited about the progress we've made" Reveal what's going on for you and then move on to the next person. Once check-in is complete, you may want to revisit anyone in the group who might have been feeling distressed and in need of more attention in order to resolve an issue.

TAKE TURNS

Recognize that everyone will get a turn to speak and agree to wait until others have completely finished before beginning to speak. It's helpful to collectively agree on a signal that speakers can offer to the rest of the group indicating when they're finished speaking, for example ending with the phrase, "I'm complete." This makes it clear that the floor is now open for others.

PAUSE

It's a good idea to leave a 5 second pause between speakers. This allows some space for people to digest what's been said and brings in a quality of mindfulness. Allowing such space may be initially challenging especially if there's disagreement with something someone is saying and there's a desire to correct, defend or contribute in some way. Allowing completion and space will be more productive in the end as it ensures that people's need to be heard will be met.

SPEAK HONESTLY

Speak with honesty and without censorship. In order to develop and maintain trust on a team, it is vitally important that people reveal themselves. This can be fairly frightening for some, especially if there is disagreement and previous experiences of conflict have led to alienation. Expressing ourselves honestly can also be frightening when there are authority figures present. People need to experience a certain level of safety and security if they're going to speak openly. Subordinates therefore need reassurance that their honest expression is welcome and desired and in fact critical for the health of the team and that there will be no repercussions as a result of what they say. Staying focused on feelings and needs while expressing honesty will help team members establish the common thread between them while minimizing the possibility of people taking things personally. A team built on trust will be better positioned to get genuine commitment from its team members thereby optimizing results.

SPEAK MINDFULLY

Refrain from using language that implies wrongness. For example, instead of saying "Drew is always late



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for meetings which is quite inconsiderate and disrespectful", try: "When Drew arrived 30 minutes later than she had agreed, I was annoyed and my need for consideration was not met." Be specific about the behaviour you observe and share your feelings and needs.

SAY MORE WITH LESS WORDS

Be concise; the more words people use, the harder it becomes for listeners to take everything in. Clarity is often lost for both the speaker and listeners as the most valuable information becomes buried in abstraction and explanation. Less words generally yield greater impact. Try 40 words or less. Have everyone agree to experiment with brevity.

GO FIRST

Inspire and lead by example. If there are behaviours you'd like to see in others, be willing to be the first to demonstrate the behaviour you'd like to see.

BEFRIEND CONFLICT

Remember that disagreements are bound to occur between people. Don't try to avoid talking about

sensitive issues. This allows a buildup of negative emotion. Rather, engage fully with the intention of learning and getting everyone's needs met. In his book *Toxic Emotions at Work* (Harvard Business School Press, 2003) author Peter Frost writes: "While emotional pain is an integral component of organized life, it is the human response to the pain that determines whether it becomes toxic or generative, focusing people on ways to harness, absorb or to overcome it, whether it endures as a debilitating poison or is transformed into a force for health." Take these words to heart.

FOCUS ON NEEDS FIRST...

Stay focused on needs/values. (Have a needs list available for people to reference.) People can more readily accept and value what's being said when needs are clearly stated. It's easier to warm up to the statement "The way this case was handled didn't meet my needs for fairness and equality and I'm wondering if you're willing to explore with me how it might be handled differently in future" than the statement "I was treated unfairly and that's unacceptable."

...SOLUTIONS LATER

Needs before solutions. Unfortunately, most people are trained to go immediately to solutions without identifying the needs. An example of this is, "I need someone to take over ordering supplies." Even though the word "need" has been used, a solution has been expressed instead of a need. It would be more accurate to say, "I'm feeling overwhelmed and have a need for support. Is there anyone who would be willing to take over this task?" A different example would be "We've all agreed that providing quality care

to our clients is very important. We've also agreed that the well-being of our staff is equally important. Does anyone have any ideas about how we can ensure meeting both these needs in the face of cutbacks?" Making clear reference to needs makes this a significantly different message from: "The cutbacks are unfortunate but we'll just have to deal with it and overcome the challenges."

TRACK NEEDS

Track the needs that are on the table and have clarity on whose needs are being addressed. A great deal of time can be used ineffectively by speakers bouncing off each other, leading the discussion in a different direction and away from the present needs. The result is that people are not heard, clarity is lost and frustration sets in. If new issues are raised during the course of the meeting, identify them, place them on the agenda and resume with the current item.

Common Needs:

Being heard, Inclusion in decision making, Clarity, Consideration, Cooperation, Effectiveness, Equality, Harmony, Honesty, Recognition, Respect, Safety, Trust, Understanding.

ASK FOR SOMETHING

End on a clear request. If you want to make sure that you have been heard as you would like, then it is useful to make a request to that effect. "I'd like to be sure I've communicated clearly. Can someone help me out by letting me know what you've heard?" You might also be interested in knowing what others are experiencing having heard you speak. If so ask, "Can others tell me what goes on for you hearing this?" If you have a solution to offer, again make a request for what you would like. "Karen, would you be willing to

assume this task for the next 2 weeks?"

GET TEAM COMMITMENT

Don't assume people are genuinely willing to commit just because they don't object after you say what you'd like or because a motion has been passed. Unexpressed objections will show up later as half-hearted efforts that produce less than desired results. Ask people if they object and let them know you want to hear objections. "Is there anyone present who is not agreement with proceeding as suggested?" Depending on how input has been received in the past, people may need to learn to trust that their objections are truly welcome and will be given consideration. If someone objects, explore what's behind the objection. There's more ground to cover if there are needs that would not be met by their agreement. It's more effective to deal with the needs now as a preventative measure than later as a clean up.

CELEBRATE

Incorporate time to celebrate accomplishments and express gratitude. People give of their time and energy and have a need to receive regular and genuine feedback that their contributions matter and make a difference. Knowing that what we do matters provides us with the necessary fuel to continue giving and minimizes the occurrence of apathy and burnout.

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