

HOW TO

BY DOUG PACKARD

Produce memorable kick-off meetings

This time of year is usually full of first-quarter meetings, which often leads to business leaders wrestling with how to produce effective meetings. Whether meeting with the entire company or a selected team, planning and facilitating meetings is a crucial skill for any leader.

Without the right involvement, approach and agenda, you risk setting a tone that could prevent the business from achieving its 2014 goals — even if the meeting content itself is solid. It's important to make meetings memorable and provide themes the team can recall well after the meeting concludes. If you're not sure where to start, here are a few ideas to put you on the right track.

Define the meeting goals

I recommend to my clients that their annual and quarterly meetings cover three areas:

- 1 Celebrate accomplishments:** This is a great way to start any meeting — discuss what worked well and what the business accomplished. Acknowledge all who contributed so they feel appreciated. A carefully selected gift for participants, such as a piece of company logo wear, can be a nice touch.
- 2 Share lessons:** What was learned in the past year? Consider feedback from customers, employees and management. What did not go as planned? Why? And what did we learn?
- 3 Discuss the plan for the road ahead:** Share the plan going forward and identify the priorities. What will we do differently based on the learnings?

Discussing these areas may be all you need to do at an annual or quarterly meeting. But if the business faces pressing issues, you should allot extra time for delving into or defining the plan of attack.

Address specific issues

When extending a meeting to dive into an issue, you may simply need to discuss how you will implement required changes identified in the first part of the meeting. It may be necessary, however, to do some root causes analysis before defining a solution and/or action plan.

Another consideration is team effectiveness. How could the team work more collaboratively? For example, you may be able to work on an issue and learn a new tool at the same time. You could decide to include a personal growth activity that also allows the staff to get to know one another better. Some companies accomplish this and have fun by working on a charity project during a segment of the meeting. These exercises increase the chances of meeting success and may actually serve as the most important aspect. People usually remember how you made them feel, more so than what you told them.

With any team-sharing exercise, start with less personal topics. Examples of things to share might include favorite vacation spots, a favorite hobby or their worst travel ordeal. If the team knows each other well, it may be appropriate to go deeper. Sharing typically works best if the leader goes first. Once the audience hears an example, they usually relax, share more than they expected and have a fun with it.

Don't act alone

Business leaders should not produce meetings on their own — the more involvement from others in planning and leading the meeting, the more likely the meeting will go well. And, the more the team participates, the better the chances of the audience buying into the ideas addressed.

Try to include as many people as possible across the organizational chart, as well as external participants. The perspective of customers, vendors, industry/product experts, alumni and significant others all might be

appropriate for a segment of a meeting, if not the entire meeting.

Depending on the scope of the meeting, you might also benefit from an external event planner and/or facilitator. Such resources often help meetings run more smoothly than if led by people emotionally tied to the issues.



DOUG PACKARD, CEO and owner of Renaissance Executive Forums in Maine and New Hampshire and Doug Packard Consulting in Portland, can be reached at DPACKARD@DOUGPACKARDCONSULTING.COM

DOUGPACKARDCONSULTING.COM