

Alternatives to meetings

We are in the midst of an information and communication explosion. There are more ways than ever to share information and communicate with others. Yet, this doesn't mean there have been dramatic or significant improvements in communication effectiveness.

Just by having technology accessible in business doesn't ensure that it will be used as it was intended. Many organizations have their top leaders spending countless hours travelling to and from *meetings*, only to later complain about their lack of productivity and a wasting of valuable time. With so many business professionals spread out in multiple locations, consider the following tips and tools that will help you become a more efficient and effective communicator while sharing important information:

Stop conducting meetings just to have a meeting. Go back and ask the question: "Why are we holding this meeting in the first place, and is there another way to accomplish our goals?" Many meetings don't need to be held and, in turn, many of the precious hours spent in transit getting to and from these meetings could be avoided. Could the information be shared in a conference call or video conference or even via e-mail if the purpose is to transfer information? What is the ultimate value of having everyone sitting around the same table and incurring all the costs associated with this effort? These are just some of the tough and very basic questions that must be asked.

Do you have the right technology in place to replace face-to-face meetings? Skype is a terrific tool to communicate and interact one-on-one, but it's not the right technology for a group of six to ten professionals. The key here is to use Skype for more intimate communication while investing in video-conferencing equipment that is consistent with the needs of your organization. If you say you can't afford it, the question is, can you really afford to have so many of your top people traveling from place to place (often in traffic) just to get to a meeting? How do you calculate all of that lost productivity?

Do you really need to SEE each other in order to communicate? Sometimes, there is no need to Skype or video conference. I have been involved in teleconferences that have been extremely productive as long as the meeting facilitator is focused on an agenda, gets participants engaged and moves toward concrete meeting goals. Teleconferencing is particularly effective with business professionals who have history together.

Set specific time limits. The more participants know exactly how long a meeting will take (as opposed to being open-ended) the greater the chance that they will invest the energy and commitment necessary to be engaged in a meaningful way. Further, whatever time limit you set, make sure you keep to it.

One of the biggest reasons business professionals complain about meetings is that they are unproductive. They often ask themselves: "Why do I have to be at this meeting?" So, before you decide to hold a meeting, ask yourself who needs to be in this meeting and who doesn't? Don't invite certain people who would be more productive doing other things, but make sure they receive a summary of what was discussed and agreed to in the meeting so they can stay in the loop.

Finally, regardless of the meeting format you establish, ensure that every meeting ends with specific action items that include who will be responsible for what, and when those action items are expected to be completed. Deadlines are essential. Accountability is crucial. Without these important pieces of information, future meetings will suffer and everyone involved will become frustrated.

Adapted from stand-deliver.com

Ex. 1 Find the words or expressions in the text which mean the following:

- 1) in the middle of: _____
- 2) however: _____
- 3) available: _____
- 4) the absence of something: _____
- 5) to realize a goal: _____
- 6) valuable: _____
- 7) final, most important: _____
- 8) a person who conducts a meeting and makes sure it runs smoothly:

- 9) the plan of a meeting: _____
- 10) to follow something closely, e.g. a plan: _____
- 11) to see to it that something happens: _____
- 12) a due date: _____
- 13) responsibility: _____

Ex. 2 Match the expressions from the two columns into logical collocations:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1) dramatic | a time limit |
| 2) to conduct | call |
| 3) a conference | action items |
| 4) to incur | improvements |
| 5) associated | meeting |
| 6) a face-to-face | in the loop |
| 7) lost | a meeting |
| 8) to set | costs |
| 9) to stay | productivity |
| 10) specific | costs |

Ex. 3 Provide English equivalents of these expressions:

1) konkretny plan działania	7) wyznaczyć ramy czasowe
2) ponieść koszty	8) znaczna poprawa
3) pozostawać w kręgu osób poinformowanych	9) zgodny z czymś
4) prowadzący spotkanie	10) zaangażowanie
5) odpowiedzialność	11) prowadzić spotkanie
6) powiązane koszty	12) przestrzegać

Grammar corner...

In Business English grammar often means functions. Today you will learn how to function in an English-speaking meeting. If you are the one holding the meeting, you ought to say what the agenda will be, e.g. **today we will be dealing with / addressing the issue of / tackling the problem of ...** If you would like to leave something for later, you can say: **we will discuss it during AOB (any other business) toward the end of the meeting.** No one likes to be interrupted when they speak, so if someone does that tell them to: **please refrain from interrupting you** or that you **would rather not be interrupted.** Sometimes it so happens that you **get off topic** and the participants need to be **brought back on track.** In that situation you can say: **coming back to our original point ... If you have lost your audience (or worse yet, they lost you)** you may tell them: **may I have your attention, please?** And, finally, when you're done, you can either say: **ok, let's wrap it up, shall we** or **give the floor** to someone else by saying: **ok, over to Bill** or **the floor is yours, Jim.** You may also say: **over to Bob.** All phrases mean that you are done and they are supposed to continue.

Ex. 4 Complete the sentences with ONE word:

- 1) Ok guys, today we will be _____ with the dropping sales.
- 2) I won't be taking any off-topic questions now, let's leave it for the _____, shall we?
- 3) I haven't finished yet, so if you'd _____ from interrupting me, please.
- 4) I'm sorry, you _____ us, could you clarify?
- 5) I think we need to get back on _____ here.
- 6) May I have your _____, please? If you will take your seats, we can begin.
- 7) That's about it, so let's _____ it up by summarizing what we've discussed so far.
- 8) We've managed to _____ the issue of black PR.
- 9) Ok, for more details, _____ to Brian.
- 10) The _____ is yours Mike, tell us some more, will you?

GLOSSARY	
to address an issue	poruszyć kwestię
AOB (any other business)	wolne wnioski
to refrain from doing sth	powstrzymać się od czegoś
audience	publiczność, uczestnicy zebrania
the floor	głos, podczas zebrania
to be in the midst of	pośród, być świadkiem czegoś
to accomplish sth	dokonać czegoś
precious	drogocenny
ultimate	ostateczny
a facilitator	osoba prowadząca spotkanie
an agenda	plan spotkania
to keep to sth	trzymać się czegoś, przestrzegać
to ensure	zadbać o coś
a deadline	termin
to incur costs	ponieść koszty / wydatki
associated costs	powiązane koszty / wydatki
face-to-face meetings	spotkanie twarzą w twarz
lost productivity	utracona / zmniejszona produktywność
to stay in the loop	pozostać w kręgu osób poinformowanych
action items	plan działania
to afford something	móc sobie pozwolić na coś

ANSWER KEY:

Ex. 1

- 1) in the midst of
- 2) yet
- 3) accessible
- 4) lack of something
- 5) to accomplish something
- 6) precious
- 7) ultimate
- 8) a facilitator
- 9) an agenda
- 10) to keep to something
- 11) to ensure
- 12) a deadline
- 13) accountability

Ex. 2

- 1) dramatic improvements
- 2) to conduct a meeting
- 3) a conference call
- 4) to incur costs
- 5) associated costs
- 6) face-to-face meetings
- 7) lost productivity
- 8) to set a time limit
- 9) to stay in the loop
- 10) specific action items

Ex. 3

- 1) specific action items
- 2) to incur costs
- 3) to stay in the loop
- 4) a facilitator
- 5) accountability
- 6) associated costs
- 7) to set a time limit
- 8) dramatic improvements
- 9) consistent with
- 10) a commitment
- 11) to hold a meeting
- 12) to keep to something

Ex. 4

- 1) dealing
- 2) AOB
- 3) refrain
- 4) lost
- 5) track
- 6) attention
- 7) wrap
- 8) tackle
- 9) over
- 10) floor