



HOW TO HOLD STAFF MEETINGS LIKE A BOSS



Five pearls for improving employee relationships and eliminating wasted time.

BY SOLOMON GOULD, OD, MBA

Team unity and cohesion have never been more important. The COVID-19 global pandemic has had a devastating impact on the foundational solidarity of many eye care practices and on the psychosocial needs of their employees. The early mandated shutdowns swiftly humbled us all and brought to the surface the reality of our vulnerability as small business owners. Since those

days, subsequent resurgences have highlighted the importance of having a game plan and an optimally effective team for sustainability and success. Remember, without your team, you have no business.

Like the ringing of Pavlov's bell,¹ for some employees the mere mention of the words "staff meeting" leads to an involuntary cringe response. One survey found that 90% of employees

reported daydreaming during staff meetings and 73% reported that they use meeting time to do other work.² Additionally, it is estimated that \$30 billion a year is lost in the United States alone because poorly executed staff meetings prevented employees from working on more important, inspiring, or revenue-generating tasks.²

Many of us, as business owners, are guilty of *strategic inertia*: that is, doing the same thing we have always done because it has always been good enough. Let us set aside our egos and appreciate the value of going back to the drawing board for guidance on staff meeting practices and methodologies.

In this article I share proven success strategies that I have developed over the years, both leading my own teams and consulting for more than 40 other practice owners. Mind you, I have revised these strategies over the years at least a dozen times, and I will continue to do so for reasons that I will share with you.



GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

Practice owners can spend countless hours preparing for,

AT A GLANCE

- Solicit anonymous employee feedback after every staff meeting.
- Be mindful and respectful of different generational preferences, and tailor your interactions to each employee accordingly.
- Share meeting agendas with your team in advance so they have time to formulate thoughts and questions. This also helps keep meetings on track.

executing, and then fretting over the performance of their staff meetings. We continue to repeat this process every week, every month, or however frequently we conduct our staff meetings. This does not have to be the case.

A telephone survey of more than 1,300 business owners and managers and their employees found that, although 79% of the owners and managers said that meetings they initiated were extremely or very productive, only 44% of employees agreed with this statement.³

Hands down, the best way to improve your success with staff meetings is to solicit anonymous employee feedback after every staff meeting. There are numerous free software programs that can be used for this purpose, including Survey Monkey.



LEARN ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

If you parent your children all in the same way, regardless of their age, gender, or abilities, your efforts will be futile at best. Similarly, if you foster your employees all in the same way, regardless of their age, professional background, culture, and ethnicity, you will earn yourself a gold medal in the “work hard, not smart” contest, your employee retention rate will be nominal, and your Indeed account will become one of your highest line-item expenses.

Understanding the importance of inclusion in the workplace pays exorbitant dividends. The best book I have

read on the subject of workplace culture and fostering an ideal workplace for individuals of all backgrounds is *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work*, by John Newstrom.⁴ The main takeaway from this book is an understanding of the cultural bases for the human behavior of people of different backgrounds. With this knowledge, one can work smart, not hard, and foster a workplace environment within which anyone would want to work.

Staff meetings are the ideal time to shine in this area. When you recognize and understand the differences in motivation and behavior among people of different backgrounds, your employees will feel validated and more highly energized to engage and commit to the success of your meeting agendas.

Taking the initiative to learn the characteristics of different generations is one of the best ways to ensure success in leading and working with people. It is without a doubt the primary reason I have been as successful as I have. Childhood sets the stage for how people perceive the world, how they communicate, and how they show commitment to their employers.

Did you know that baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) prioritize stability and a steady paycheck over any other attribute of their employer?⁵ How about the fact that employees of generation Z (born between 1997 and 2015) change their

jobs almost every 12 months because they do not feel that their workplace provides them with enough personal development?⁵ Did you realize that generation X employees (born between 1965 and 1976) are your most loyal employees, as long as you are honest and transparent with them?⁵ Finally, were you aware that millennials (born between 1977 and 1995) are split into two categories: the “me-lennials” (aged 25 to 31) and the “mega-lennials” (aged 32 to 43), each mirroring the generation above and below, respectively?⁵ As a practice owner or manager, learning the fundamental differences between the generations will set you up for success in all scenarios of leading your employees—including, and especially during, staff meetings.



BE IN TUNE WITH YOUR TEAM

I learned early on the valuable lesson of checking in with employees on an individual basis whenever one acts out or is otherwise out of harmony with the rest of the team or the business’s policies and procedures. Subpar behavior or work performance may be an indication that there is something more to the story.

It could be that this employee is simply the target of the month for the almost inevitable office politics. It could also indicate that there is something more serious going on in this person’s life. Approaching these employees individually not only shows your skills as a leader but also opens the door of opportunity to prevent the loss of a good employee who is simply going through a rough patch.



USE TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Today we have a plethora of technologies to enhance the quality of our staff
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meetings. In contrast to the days when we drew graphs on paper (and yes, we were excited when colored pencils became a thing) to portray our business analytics, today we have software programs that can automatically draft tables, display month-to-month variances, and chart other important key performance indicators.

We can now also record meetings via software programs such as Zoom and Google Hangouts and then share these links with employees who were unable to attend. Performance evaluations can now be conducted and then air-dropped within seconds. Company goals can be shared in real time via Google Drive.

That said, I encourage employers and managers to be mindful and respectful of the different generational preferences noted above and to tailor interactions to each employee individually.



EFFICIENCY IS TRANSPARENCY

Efficiency is key to successful staff meetings, especially if it is instituted consistently. The best way practice owners can set themselves up for success through efficiency is by sharing the meeting agenda with the team in advance. When this is done, employees can be better prepared to contribute to the meeting because they have had time to formulate their thoughts and substantiate them with relevant examples.⁶ As many of us can recall, there is almost no worse feeling than making a claim in a meeting and then not being able to recall in the moment an example from our experience.

Additionally, setting the agenda and communicating it in advance ensures that the meeting remains within the confines of the agenda.

Too often, practice owners and managers preside over never-ending and everything-but-effective meetings simply because no specific agenda was communicated in advance. ■

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