

Effective Meetings
Leadership Toolbox
Podcast Transcript

Centennial Student Union & Student Activities
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Welcome to the Student Activities' Online Leadership Toolbox. My name is Greg Wilkins, and I am the Associate Director of Student Activities at Minnesota State Mankato. I am going to be your podcast guide. This podcast is about effective meetings.

Compare these two students who lead their Recognized Student Organization (RSO) meetings. Jordan creates a meeting agenda, and Taylor does not have one. Jordan's club is well organized, has active RSO membership, holds an annual community celebration, and last year won the Club of the Year award. Taylor's club members are not active, many of them do not come week to week, and last year they almost closed because of the lack of interest.

These two RSOs are different. Jordan's is making a difference on campus, and Taylor's is barely surviving. When speaking to members of Taylor's RSO, they say when the group meets that Taylor does not have an agenda, the meetings are disorganized, and members do not actively participate. Jordan's meetings however are different. Everyone is involved in agenda setting, checking-in with project completion, and everyone participates. Taylor's meetings could be better managed if Taylor used effective meeting planning. Effective meetings is a guide for making decisions about how to invest one of your most valuable resources: your time.

So, what are we going to do? You probably have heard the ol' adage, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Effective meetings are about planning and not just showing up to chit chat. There are 4 magical concepts in meeting planning.

- Achieve the meeting objective
- Take up a minimum amount of time
- Leave participants feeling a sensible process has been followed
- Receive group participation

Let's look at the first one, meeting objective. What is a meeting objective? Think of it like this, "At the close of the meeting, I want the group to..."

- have made a decision
- have generated ideas for...
- report on future or past events
- have made plans for XYZ

Did you know that there are 525,600 minutes in a year? It's true. Time is a precious resource that cannot be reclaimed. Make every minute matter. What I always tell students is, "Minutes matter, moments count." Use your club time wisely. Some things I want you to consider are:

- Time is a precious resource, and no one wants theirs wasted
- End and start on time
- Time wasted in a meeting is time wasted for everyone attending

So, how do you stop wasting time? Create an agenda. It will help you stay focused.

When preparing an agenda, preparation is a key to success. Things to consider are:

- **Priorities**—what absolutely must be covered
- **Results**—what do you need to accomplish at the meeting
- **Participants**—who needs to be at the meeting for it to be successful
- **Sequence**—in what order will you cover topics
- **Timing**—how much time will you spend on each topic
- **Date and Time**—when is the meeting
- **Place**—where will the meeting occur

Save time. Encourage members to come prepared. If it's a meeting to solve a problem or create ideas, ask participants to come prepared with ideas and/or solutions. If you are discussing an ongoing project, have each participant summarize his or her progress before the meeting and circulate reports to members.

Share the responsibility. Assign a particular topic of discussion to various people to increase involvement and interest. Don't do all the talking yourself. And on the agenda, indicate who will lead the discussion or presentation of each item.

Respect time. Insist that everyone honor the time allotted. Start your meeting on time. Do not recap what was already discussed for latecomers. It's their responsibility to find out information that was discussed through the meeting minutes or after the event from other participants. Finish on time. Remember, whatever can be done outside the meeting time should be. This includes circulating reports for people

to read beforehand, and assigning smaller group meetings to discuss issues relevant to only certain people.

Meeting in Progress. Now that you have an agenda set, let's pretend we have a meeting in progress. If certain people are dominating the conversation, make a point of asking others their ideas. At the end of each agenda item, quickly summarize what was said and ask participants to confirm that it's a fair summary. Make sure someone is assigned to take notes during the meeting. Note items that will need further discussion. Watch body language and make adjustments as necessary. Take a break if needed but remember to get back on task. Ensure the meeting stays on topic. List all tasks that are generated at the meeting. Make a note as to who is assigned to do what and by when. At the close of the meeting, quickly summarize next steps and inform everyone that a meeting summary will be forthcoming.

The meeting is now over. Take time to debrief. Determine what went well and what could have been done better. Evaluate the meeting's effectiveness based on how well you met the objective. This will help you to improve your process of running effective meetings.

Meeting summary. Prepare your meeting notes after your club's gathering. This will be forwarded to participants and stakeholders. It is a record of what was accomplished and who is responsible for what the team will do. This is a crucial part of effective meetings that often gets overlooked. You need a written record of what transpired, along with a list of action items that specific individuals have agreed to perform.

Bravo, you are now on your way to success! Let's wrap up what we discussed. Running an effective meeting is more than sending out a notice that your club is to meet at a particular time and place. Effective

meetings need structure and order. Without these elements they can go on forever and not accomplish anything. With a solid objective in mind, a tight agenda and a commitment to involving participants in the planning, preparation and execution of the meeting, you are well on your way to chairing effective meetings.

Alright, it's now time for your involvement. I'd like for you this week to move toward effective meeting planning. For starters, I want you to develop a meeting objective. What do you want to accomplish in your time together? With that in mind, build an agenda and have at least one person in your club present on a topic. I would also like for you to encourage feedback and get at least one other person assigned to a task for the next time you meet.

Let's review quickly what was presented: we discussed what a meeting objective is, what an agenda may include, how to save time in meetings, and an exercise for you to complete. You can do this! You are one step closer to running an effective meeting.

This podcast was presented by Student Activities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Find other podcasts at mnsu.edu/activities/toolbox.