



# What do others do?

Leadership nuggets collected from the world of business, psychology, sport and the creative industries (and more!) and what we can learn from them.

## Meaningful Meetings

### The good, the bad and the ugly

Meetings matter because they tell the people in them something about our priorities, our character, our attitude to them (and their time) and how brave and bold we are.

There are multiple meeting traps we can so easily fall into which cause 'paper cuts'; those little irritating things that people notice and hurt more than we think they could/would/should.

#### 8 Meeting Traps:

- Not having rules of engagement.
- Overrunning without warning/apology.
- Getting side-tracked by an issue that is urgent and neglecting the important.
- Few people dominate it, too many stay silent in it.
- It could have been an email.
- Doesn't give people what they need/want.
- Meeting Mush – where the meeting has too many different purposes it's all beige.
- No clear actions at the end.

If we fall into these traps we can appear out of touch with people, look like we do not respect their time, look like we value the loudest voices, have no control over the agenda and appear to be happy wasting peoples' time. On top of that we may also look like we lack clarity since we haven't been clear. The way we lead meetings tells people a lot about our leadership.

There are simple things we can do to remedy these 8 Meeting Traps. They are simple solutions but they are not easy, in fact sometimes they are really hard because change usually is.

Here are some ideas to try.

#### 1. *Have rules of engagement.*

Do a 'contract' piece around the rules of how we run meetings. Agree things like:

- What do we do if we run over? Can people leave? Do they have to stay?
- How do we want people to contribute? (Do we want people to interrupt? Add to the chat? Put hands up? Can they chat between themselves in the chat? Can they type on laptops in meetings? Are we asking people to close emails? Turn notifications off?)
- How will we handle disagreements? (Pause the meeting to think, handle then or afterwards?)
- Are we going to make decisions immediately or leave cooling down time?



## **2. *Be clear what the meeting is for.***

- Set an agenda, with timings and who is delivering what.
- Is anything better in an email? If so, consider that.
- Agree for each item what is being expected, for example, a decision, a discussion, information, and/or confirmation.
- Start each meeting with a review of the actions from last week and end each meeting with an update of decisions/actions agreed this meeting.

## **3. *Include everybody's thinking***

Not everyone can process rapidly in meetings, there will be several who will have their best response several hours later and others who love the thrill of sharing their thoughts in the moment. Try some of these techniques to include everyone:

- Give pre-reading and collect comments in advance of the meeting then discuss those.
- Ask everyone a question and ask them to write their responses in the chat at the same time.
- Use the Golden Silence at the start of a meeting where everyone has a chance to write down their thoughts/questions without speaking.
- When making a proposal, ask people to write down the questions they hope you have thought about (this is less threatening but gives people a chance to think deeply).
- On decisions, agree a cooling off period before finally deciding, this allows further reflection and less knee-jerk reactions in the moment.

## **4. *Read the room in real time***

If you are chairing the meeting, you must read the room and then take the relevant action.

- If you feel like people are not ready to focus, give them 5 minutes of silence to empty their thought on to a piece of paper so they can then fully concentrate.
- Take a pause to break tension, to raise energy levels or to ease the transition between different topics.
- For change of energy, ask people to recall a funny/moving/joy-filled moment they have experienced this week and share it with a partner (energy levels will rise).
- Do you need to switch to some of the techniques above to get the thoughts of everyone in the room?

Meetings should bring energy, clarity, purpose and action. They are also examples of your leadership in action. If you think about the last meeting you chaired, what did it say about you? What could you change?