Running Great Executive Team Meetings

“Meetings are the setting, the arena, the moment when the most important discussions and decisions take place. What could be more important?” Lencioni

"The mark of a great meeting is not how short it is or whether it ends on time. The key is whether it ends with clarity and commitment from participants." Lencioni

“If leaders say they don’t like meetings, then they don’t like leading.” Lencioni

* Meetings are the central activity of leadership. As Trust leaders, we go to meetings, have conversations and pour through issues.
* We should see our meetings as an actress sees a play, a surgeon sees an operation or a teacher sees a class. Meetings should be our favourite part of being a Trust leader.
* Accepting bad meetings at the executive level sets the precedent for the rest of our Trust. What is tolerated at the top of an organisation is often the ceiling of what can be expected deeper within.
* Bad meetings are not inevitable. There is nothing inherently boring or unproductive about meetings.
* They are the activity at the centre of every organisation and should, therefore, be both interesting and relevant.
* The single biggest problem with meetings is ‘meeting stew’. That’s what happens when we try to cram everything from strategy to tactics to administrivia into one meeting.
* There are different reasons to have a meeting. And if you try to do too much, you won’t do anything well. Meeting stew is the best way to stifle the life out of a meeting.
* We can go from dreading meetings to relishing them simply by avoiding meeting stew and inciting productive conflict.
* Meetings are what leaders do, and the solution to bad meetings is not the elimination of them, but rather the transformation of them into meaningful, engaging and relevant activities.
* Good meetings have debate and conflict.  People are able to be passionate without consequence.  The leader prioritises what will be talked about.
* Leaders of meetings need to put the right issues — often the most controversial ones — on the table at the beginning of their meetings. By demanding that the team wrestle with those issues until resolution has been achieved, they can create genuine, compelling drama, and prevent their audiences from checking out.
* If we don’t nurture that conflict — or drama — in the first 10 minutes of the meeting, the team will lose interest and disengage.
* What we need to do is create greater context by having separate meetings for different topics.
* **Daily check-in** is a schedule-oriented, administrative meeting that should last no more than five or 10 minutes. The purpose is simply to keep team members aligned and to provide a daily forum for activity updates and scheduling.
* **Tactical** is what most people have come to know as staff meetings. These should be approximately an hour in length, give or take 20 minutes, and should focus on the discussion and resolution of issues which effect near term objectives.

Ironically, these work best if there is no pre-set agenda. Instead, the team should quickly review one another’s priorities and the team’s overall scorecard, and then decide on what to discuss during the remainder of the meeting. This will help them avoid wasting time on trivial issues and focus only on those issues that are truly relevant and critical.

During the lightning round, fellow team members should listen closely and consider some of the following:

* + Can I support my team member with any of the items they mentioned?
  + Do I have questions about the items – do I even know what they are talking about?
  + Do I have some input I should share?

If they do have questions or need additional information, they should request for that item to be added to the agenda for the meeting. Simple. No more conversation needed (until, of course it comes up on the agenda).

The key to making these tactical meetings work is having the discipline to identify and postpone the discussion of more strategic topics, which brings us to the third kind of meeting.

* **Topical** is the most interesting kind of meeting for leaders and the most important indicator of an organisation’s strategic aptitude. It is the appropriate place for big topics, those that will have a long-term impact. These issues require more time and a different setting, one in which participants can brainstorm, debate, present ideas and wrestle with one another in pursuit of the optimal long-term solution. Each meeting should include no more than one or two topics and should allow roughly two hours for each topic.
* **Cycle off-site review** is an opportunity for team members to step away from the organisation, literally and figuratively, to reassess a variety of issues: the interpersonal performance of the team, the company’s strategy, the performance of top-tier and bottom-tier employees, morale, competitive threats and industry trends. These can last anywhere from the better part of a day to two full days each **cycle.**

Our four meetings

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Daily check-in  Time  5 – 10 minutes  (30 – 45 seconds per check-in)  Mon – Thurs 4.30pm  Microsoft Teams  ­ | Purpose  Administrative:  Connect informally around any relevant administrative / uber-tactical items  Know what colleagues are working on; not to prove how busy you are; more to ensure everyone is lined up  “What are we having for dinner?” | Keys to success   * Keep it administrative * Only share items that can be covered in 45 seconds or less * Don’t cancel even when some people can’t be there |
| Tactical  Time  45 – 90 minutes  (up to 5 minutes per item)  Friday morning  Microsoft Teams | Purpose  Tactical:  Review scorecard and resolve critical tactical obstacles and issues  RAG of defining / standard operating objectives (current performance) does not need to be specific and accurate – more about whether we need to talk more (as in process of creating agenda – take step back after RAG and decide which we should cover in tactical) | Keys to success   * Don’t set the agenda until after the initial reporting * Let the lightning round be like lightning: each person should be able to share their three priorities in 30 seconds or less. If needed, call items to the agenda and move on * Don’t peanut butter out time; talk about ‘red’ things * Postpone strategic discussions. Bell on table – gets past 5 mins ring bell – let’s decide: is this tactical? |
| Topical  Time  2+ hours  Wednesday  Face-to-face | Purpose  Strategic:  Parking lot of strategic topics; pull people in to solve big issues  Discuss, analyse, brainstorm and decide upon a critical issue affecting long-term success | Keys to success   * Focus on a specific topic * Prepare in advance * May not involve all of the Executive Team * Fully embrace and mine for conflict * Meeting ends when done talking about what’s most important – leave early or stay late |
| Cycle off-site review  Time  1 – 2 days  Face-to-face | Purpose  Developmental:  Review playbook (team development, dynamics and clarity) as well as competitive landscape, industry trends and key personnel  Review academy performance and financials  Slowing down to go fast – agree next set of ‘sprints’ | Keys to success   * Get out of the office * Focus on work, limit social activities * Don’t over-structure or over-burden the schedule |

Thoughts from the field: <https://www.tablegroup.com/hub/post/thoughts-from-the-field_-issue-5---three-common-ways-to-derail-the-tactical-meeting/>

Podcast: Make your meetings matter: <https://www.tablegroup.com/hub/post/30-live_-make-your-meetings-matter/>