Reexamine Your Recurring Meetings

Of course it's important that every meeting run as smoothly as it can. But this is especially important for recurring meetings – when the same group of people regularly gather to accomplish the same goal.

Are your recurring meetings as effective as they could be? The best way to find out is sitting right in front of you – ask the attendees themselves. By directing a few general questions to the people who know the meeting best, you'll get feedback that will quickly help you identify and address any problems that you may not be aware of yourself.

To determine if your meeting needs a little tune-up, set aside 15 minutes at the end of a meeting and ask your colleagues the following questions:

What is the purpose of this meeting?
The answer may seem painfully obvious, but ask this question to make sure everyone has the same expectations. Maybe Jim thinks your monthly project meetings are designed to give everyone a status report. But Denise thinks attendees already know what's happening and views this meeting as a chance to start planning the next phase of the project.

Is anything preventing us from achieving our basic goals in this meeting?
Are key information holders missing from the meeting? Do the meetings last too long or not long enough? The answers may surprise you. Aspects of the meeting that you thought worked well may be roadblocks to this particular group.

What are your suggestions for overcoming these obstacles?
This is the perfect opportunity for participants to suggest changes they've been thinking about. You may get insights and solutions that had never occurred to you. And because the solutions are coming from the participants themselves, you'll likely have greater buy-in when it's time to implement them.

Secret Survey
If your colleagues prefer not to openly discuss all this, ask them to anonymously fill out a questionnaire based on these three questions. Encourage them to be constructive – and creative – when offering solutions.

Use What You've Learned
Once you've gathered the feedback, spend some time analyzing it. If there isn't consensus on the meeting's purpose, that could be the root of any meeting discontent. Determine why there's confusion and ensure that everyone understands and agrees with the stated goals.

Then look for common concerns. If several people raise the same concern, you've got an issue that needs addressing. The solutions offered will likely speak to those concerns, so, again, look for the commonalities. Also consider the feasibility of the solutions. You may not

be able to eliminate the meeting, but perhaps you can reduce its length by sending people all the supporting information ahead of time for review.

By taking this approach, you'll quickly pinpoint the answers to your meeting problems and have several possible solutions in hand – all specific to the meeting and the people who attend it.