

Leading Meetings

-adapted from the book "Leading Leaders" by Mac Powell

-additional information provided by Mountain West Church

Love them or hate them, it's rare to hold a neutral opinion about meetings. Most of our presuppositions about meetings are based on our past experience. If we've been a part of good, productive meetings, we are more likely to enjoy them and appreciate their value. If we've had a more negative experience, we tend to devalue them and dread leading or participating in meetings we deem to be a waste of time.

I've known some pastors who dislike meetings so much they decide not to have any at all. Other leaders think meetings are so vital that they have meetings for everything. Both approaches are overreactions that only reinforce people's negative opinions of meetings.

How we view meetings will determine how much we prepare, contribute, and engage in them. If a team member believes meetings are a waste of time, for example, they will likely not bring their best to team sessions.

When we mindlessly put meetings in people's calendars, we risk falling into routines that reinforce negative perceptions. We must therefore be intentional and strategic about how we use meeting times.

Very few leaders have been trained to lead a good meeting. They just do what they've observed others do. And many ministry leaders dislike meetings and feel guilty for scheduling them.

So instead of dreading meetings, why not get better at leading them?

While you cannot do anything about people's past experience of meetings, you can reshape their pinion by showing them how to lead a productive meeting.

Good meetings are an essential part of accomplishing your mission, as well as shaping your culture. Good meetings can

- intensify your team's commitment to the mission of your ministry;
- clarify the vision of your ministry;
- unify the members of your team;
- grow the character and competency of your team;
- identify obstacles and prioritize next steps; and
- increase the collaborative genius of your team.

When your team leaves one of your meetings, there should be a sense that their time was invested in achieving something beneficial to the mission of the ministry.

Accomplishing great things as a team doesn't just happen because people are working on a joint mission. Unity and productivity require team rhythms, and a big part of team rhythms includes meetings. In this session, you will learn six tips for leading productive meetings that people will value attending. As a result, you can create a highly productive team—a team that enjoys each other, respects each other, and even loves each other.

In this material we will consider the character trait of zeal and note how it contributes to planning and leading highly productive and unifying meetings.
First, let's work to define our terms:

Character: Zeal

Leaders demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment to that which God has called them to accomplish.

Competency: Leading Meetings

Plan and lead highly engaging meetings that enhance the team's productivity and unity.

Deepen Your Character: Zeal

On more than one occasion I've looked at my friend Terence and said, "You are more like Jesus than anyone else I know." What strikes me most about Terence's life is the zeal he shows for the gospel. He will go to any lengths to demonstrate the love of Jesus.

It just so happens Terence's passion is for the homeless— those that are often overlooked in our society. There was a season in his life when he himself lived on the streets. Later on, he gave his life to Christ and, as he grew in his faith, so too did his desire to reach this overlooked sector of society. When he looks at this people group, his heart breaks because he is desperate for them to experience life in a different way, like he did. He is passionate for them to know and feel loved.

Terence demonstrates zeal in so many ways. But perhaps the most powerful example was when, in 2015, he moved out of his home for thirty days so that he could live under a bridge in downtown Atlanta, among the homeless. Kissing his wife and two small kids goodbye, he packed one change of clothes, a toothbrush, and a backpack. From November 25 to December 25, he lived on the streets. Every day he would interact with those who were homeless. He would listen to their stories and build relationships. He wasn't there to "save" them; he was there to connect, relate, and love them.

Terence is consumed by a zeal for the homeless to know the love of Jesus.

Growing in zeal will help keep your life focused on that which is most important. It will keep you going when things get difficult. Zeal gives you courage, persistence, and focus. And yes, zeal is important in leading meetings as well.

Meetings should be anything but boring. When you meet with your team you are discussing God's work! God's vision! And if we are zealous about God's work, it will carry over into our meetings. Yes, meetings sometimes require mundane elements, things that may not be exciting but still need to be communicated. But most of your meeting time should be used to share the vision God has put on your heart and to collaborate with your team to advance the next steps toward that vision. If that doesn't get you excited, I don't know what will.

I've personally sat in planning meetings with Terence, and although he is a quiet, mild-mannered guy, you feel the brokenness of his heart; you sense his zeal. You leave a meeting with Terence knowing that the time invested was time that will advance the kingdom mission God put on his heart.

Meeting with your team is the opportunity to plan actions that lead to God's ideal in your ministry. We must remember when we lead meetings, we are working on God's business, his priorities, the things he has placed on our heart. That's why my favorite part of meetings is when I get the chance to cast vision to my team or collaborate around a challenge in order to identify what God is saying to us. I'm not saying every meeting has to be led with expressive enthusiasm, but I am saying each meeting we lead should mean something in our spirit. Ask yourself, how will the agenda items we talk about during this meeting advance the mission God has put on our hearts? That's why it's so important we grow in this aspect of our character.

Scripture

In John 2, the disciples were struck by the zeal Jesus demonstrated when he drove the money changers from the temple. Jesus had come to demonstrate the love and grace of God, but the money changers had no interest in people's encounter with God. They just saw an opportunity to personally profit from the thousands of people pouring into Jerusalem to worship God during Passover. When Jesus saw what was taking place, he couldn't tolerate it and was moved to do something about it. He confronted the situation in a way that no one would forget.

As you read the following Scripture, meditate on what the author wishes to communicate, and answer the questions below. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and challenge you as a leader about how you can develop your character so that you are filled with zeal in your own life and leadership.

John 2:13 – 17

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at

tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

Those selling animals for sacrifice and exchanging coins were providing a practical service for those who traveled great distances to come and make sacrifices at Passover.

- Why then was Jesus so disturbed by their actions?
- What do you admire about Jesus' actions in this passage?
- How has zeal been demonstrated in your life in the past hity days?
- What actions do you need to take to deepen zeal in your character?

Now that we have examined the character trait of zeal, we can begin to work through the core competency for this module: Leading meetings-plan and lead highly engaging meetings that enhance the team' productivity and unity. As you read what follows, note how zeal can undergird a leader's competency of leading meetings.

Leading Meetings

We just finished another meeting, and once again I walked frustrated. Why did we even meet? I thought. What did we accomplish? Did anyone leave with any action steps? Did we make any decisions, or did we just discuss items? Was this a waste of time? And my biggest question: What do I need to do to make our meetings better?

Yes, you got that right. I was the one leading this ineffective meeting. You've probably been there too. You are bored or frustrated in the meetings that you have control of. That's doubly frustrating.

That's when I did a mental exercise that woke me up to my need to run better meetings. I wrote down the names of the seven people in my meeting. Next, I put each person's annual salary, which totaled around \$420,000. Then I did the math and calculated that the meeting cost our church \$202 for one hour. Since our meeting was a weekly occurrence, that meant our church was paying \$10,100 each year for this team to meet. Yikes. So I began to ask, are we getting the bang for our buck out of these meetings? At that moment I realized I was wasting the church's money every time I lead unproductive meetings. And if you are not careful, bad meetings not only waste money, but they also waste the talent of your team. Well-run meetings capitalize on your team's strengths, insights, and experience in a way that helps you better accomplish the mission God has called you to.

As a leader of a ministry department, running meetings will be a regular part of your routine. Regardless of whether your role requires you to lead meetings with other staff or with volunteer leaders, it's essential you lead them well. If you are leading bad meetings, the signs will begin to show:

- People will make excuses to get out of the meeting.
- Team members will come unprepared.
- People tend to work on other things.

It only takes two or three unproductive meetings in a row to establish an unhealthy team culture. So let's consider six tips for running great meetings.

Tip #1: Use Meetings to Shape Team Culture

If you ask someone why meetings exist, you will likely hear, "To get things done." "To make decisions," or "To communicate information." While these are all true, there is an often-overlooked benefit to meetings: they can be used to shape team culture.

Meetings involve times when you are all together, thinking around the same topic, or tackling the same problem. A lot of informal discussion happens just before the meeting starts and right after a meeting ends. Inevitably someone says something funny, and everyone laughs together. Meetings allow your team to get to know each other. They teach your team to listen, work together, solve problems together, compromise, and discover each other's preferences and opinions. A study of 133 factory teams found that higher levels of interpersonal sensitivity, curiosity, and emotional stability resulted in more cohesive teams and increased prosocial behavior among team members? This is why you should never just do a meeting to get it over with. You need to allocate time to engage in both the formal and informal benefits of a meeting.

Think through the type of team culture you desire to cultivate. For example, I want a team culture that is productive, relational, transparent, unified, and fun. Because I have defined those traits, I can now be intentional in leading meetings in ways that will shape this culture.

If I want a culture that is transparent, I might ask a question in a meeting like: "Okay, can someone give me three to four reasons why you think the solution we are discussing is not the best way to solve our problem?"

Or, because I want a culture where the team has fun, I might kick off our meeting with a question that gets people sharing and laughing.

Use your meetings to shape the culture of your team. We make 1 critical mistake when we just make meetings about the pragmatic elements of our work. Remember, people's personalities and behaviors are the avenue through which our values are ultimately expressed. If you want to shape your culture, you have to know and help shape the people on your team to express that culture.

Write down three to five words that describe the team culture you want to build?
What are some practical ways you will use meetings to shape that culture?

Tip #2: Predetermine the Objectives

The worst thing that can happen after investing sixty minutes of your life in a meeting is to walk out and say, "Wow, we just met and didn't accomplish a thing."

When considering meetings, the most important question you can ask is: "Why are we meeting?" For many, the answer is, "Because the meeting is on the calendar." If we are not careful, we fall into a meeting rut-meeting week after week without defining the objectives) for meeting.

Think back to the last meeting you led or attended. What was the objective? How do you know? Simply look at the results of the meeting. If you spent the hour discussing and then choosing a new church management system, the objective could be stated as: Choose a new church management system we can start using by February.

If you brainstormed a list of potential volunteers for the upcoming Serve Day, the objective could have been verbalized this way: Identify twenty names of potential volunteers we can recruit to serve on the upcoming Serve Day.

But if you cannot point to specific results, then there were not specific objectives for that meeting. It's not uncommon to hear people leave a meeting saying, "We talked about a lot but didn't make any decisions." Or "We had some good discussion but didn't leave with any action steps." These types of meetings can be deceptive. You feel as if you are focusing on the right things, but none of it leads to any action.

To prevent this from happening, predetermine the objectives you would like to accomplish. You can do this by writing these objectives down. Much like goals, written objectives keep you on track for achieving what you set out to accomplish.

You can use specific phrases to help you focus, like ***Evaluate the strengths and weakness of, Develop a 30 day plan for, Identify the five key lessons***, etc.

Once you've established the meeting objectives, then communicate that to your people. You can email them ahead of time so they can prepare their thoughts, or at least tell them at the very beginning of the meeting.

It's also important to ask who needs to be in the meeting, which group of people? Sometimes you don't need to have a meeting but a conversation with just one person.

Tip #3: Select the Right Agenda

There are 8 common elements used in meetings, Typically, I will use three to five of the elements listed below in a single meeting. I call these elements the 8 Cs. These elements help us answer the question "How will we accomplish our objectives?" After writing your objectives, choose which elements will help you best accomplish them.

Element #1 – Connect

Teams often function as a group of individuals who are very siloed but come together to gain the necessary information, and then return to their silos to continue their work. Regularly take time to connect as people. Let your team get to know each other on a personal level.

This may be for as little as five minutes. You may want to use a question that will get them talking and warmed up. Questions like:

- What was the highlight of your weekend?
- What's something fun you've done with your kids recently?
- What is your favorite coffee shop in town and why?

The objective is to connect relationally as a team and get to know each other better on a personal level. There are times when I keep this casual, and other times I make it more meaningful and personal.

Element #2 – Celebrate

Visionary leaders are known for moving fast and then moving on to the next task. Sometimes we need to include time in our meetings to celebrate the achievements of the team or an individual. This doesn't have to take long. It can be as simple as, "What's something we can celebrate from our work over the past month?" This will help team members feel appreciated and give them a sense of accomplishment as the team celebrates what God has been doing in your work or ministry. Although this doesn't take much time, it can add great value. You're not looking for everyone to give an answer; you're just getting one or two people to respond, so you can genuinely celebrate some wins of how the team has seen God at work.

Element #3-Cast Vision.

Vision is what keeps the fuel in the tank of the team. When they begin to lose sight of the vision, they lose the zeal to put their best into their work. So it's my role as a leader to cast vision in meetings. Sometimes it takes five minutes— just enough to give them an inspirational boost. Other times it's fifteen to thirty minutes to discuss deeper elements of the vision. When you keep the vision fresh, you fuel the zeal of your team.

Element #4-Check-Up.

Leaders know we have to inspect what we expect. Meetings sometimes need to include a check-up on the progress of tasks or items that team members have committed to accomplish.

These check-ups can often happen one-on-one outside meeting times, so they do not always need to be included in bigger meetings.

As I talk with different churches, one of the biggest challenges I hear them share is a lack of accountability. Accountability is partnering with an individual to provide consistent encouragement and challenge to achieve what they've committed to do.

When you integrate occasional check-ups into meeting agendas, it will help raise the level of accountability among your team. It's likely impossible for you to check up on every detail, so you'll need to be selective to prioritize the most important check-ups for a meeting.

Element #5-Coach.

A good leader can get the best out of a team member simply by getting them to use their strengths. But, as we explored in the previous module, great leaders go a step further. They not only challenge their people to use their strengths, but they also work with them to develop those strengths. Don't just use the talent of your people ... develop them.

I like to include leadership development at least once a month in team meetings. When you attempt to coach during a leadership meeting, you will find that it is helpful to take a large block of time so that you aren't rushed. Although you might be able to include multiple elements in a normal meeting, when you're coaching, you'll find you probably won't be able to do much more. The coaching portion of the agenda may last thirty to sixty minutes. The objective is to sharpen a leadership competency by learning from one another's experiences, as well as from any content you sent them to preview. During this segment of the meeting, you facilitate a discussion around an aspect of character or competency in which you want to see your team grow.

You can facilitate a robust development conversation with your team by watching a five- or ten-minute leadership video. At the end of the video, ask:

- What challenged you the most?
- What leadership strength did this affirm in you?
- What Scripture passage teaches or illustrates the primary concept of the video?
- What growth area did it reveal for you?
- What are some specific action steps you need to take to help you grow in this area?

Don't position yourself as the expert in the room; instead, let your team learn from one another. Make sure you end that time by having each person write down specific action steps they will take as a result of the training.

Element #6—Collaborate.

There are times the team needs to work together to solve a problem, brainstorm best practices, or plan an event. This element tends to take twenty to forty minutes, depending on the objective. I try to work this element into my meetings at least every two weeks. Collaboration gets your team working together in ways that bring the best thinking of everyone on the team. If you want to build a sense of ownership among your team and see them maximize their strengths, collaboration is an essential element to include in your meeting agendas.

Element #7—Communicate.

Communication is one of those items that doesn't have to take up much time in your meeting agenda, but it can reap a valuable payoff. If you don't communicate effectively, your team may not support some of the priority goals you're trying to move forward. So it's essential as a leader to help people know what they need to know.

The aim is to make sure everyone knows about any important upcoming events or dates. Ask everyone: What are the important things coming up that we all need to be aware of? Here you are simply making sure that everyone is on the same page by sharing the most important information that shapes the ministry moving forward.

Element #8-Care

A final element in good meetings is care. Here the aim is to pray for one another and share burdens. This is an easily overlooked element for some teams. Spend some time praying with and for each other. This allows your team to connect soul to soul and deepens their connection with each other.

Over the years, the 8 Cs have helped me plan well-balanced, intentional meetings. But an even bigger benefit is that this framework has taught my team how to lead meetings. It was such a joy to watch different team members take on leadership of our team. This was not only helpful to develop their competency of leading meetings, but it also built their confidence as leaders.

Tip #4: Select the Right Time Frame

As I was scheduling a meeting one day on my Google calendar, I noticed the default setting for a meeting is sixty minutes. Each time I would send a meeting invite to someone, it was automatically set for one hour, even though I may not need the full hour. It's important to schedule the right amount of time for a meeting. Even if we have a great meeting flow, if we spend four hours doing something we could accomplish in two, the meeting will feel like a waste of time.

Here are two sample agendas:

SAMPLE 1-45-Minute Meeting

Connect (10 minutes)-What was the highlight of your weekend?

Cast Vision (5 minutes) -Review the importance and progress of our one-year "battle cry" from our vision.

Collaborate (30 minutes)

- What is the best thing we do in the way we assimilate new people onto our ministry team?
- Where are we dropping the ball in the way we assimilate
- new people onto our ministry team?
- How is dropping that ball hurting us?
- Let's brainstorm some solutions.
- What action steps can we commit to right now?

SAMPLE 2-60-Minute Meeting

Celebrate (10 minutes) — What have you seen God do in your area of ministry over the past 30 days that we can celebrate together?

Coach (40 minutes) -Today, we are going to grow in the area of communication. We will watch a 10-minute video by Craig Groeschel on communication and then discuss the following questions.

- What stood out to you the most from this video?
- What are some common mistakes leaders make with
- communication?
- What Scripture passage teaches or illustrates the primary
- concept of the video?
- What strengths did this affirm in you?
- . What growth area did it reveal for you?
- What next step do you need to take to grow in your communication skills?

Care (10 minutes) — How can we pray for one another?

You will notice these two sample agendas are very different from one another. My old way of leading meetings was to take the same agenda outline and just substitute the details under each header. Those meetings were boring and often lacked purpose. But by using the 8 C template, you can plan highly engaging and purposeful meetings. Not every meeting will look or feel the same, and because your meetings aren't predictable, your team are more likely to stay engaged.

Tip #5: Evaluate Your Meeting

To evaluate, you can ask yourself these questions after every meeting.

- Did we accomplish the objective(s)?
- Did the team fully engage?
- Did everyone leave with clear action steps?
- If the answer is no to any of these, then ask a fourth question:
- What do we need to change?

It's important not to rush through this step. You may have an intuitive sense of what did or didn't work from a specific meeting, but you should take the time to jot down some notes shortly afterward. You'll be surprised at how quickly you will forget details. It might be helpful for you to also consult a trusted friend who was in the meeting to get their opinion. This will protect you from blind spots or distorted perceptions of what worked or what didn't.

Tip #6: Use Extended Meetings on Occasion to Accelerate Outcomes

Finally, think about using longer, more extended, meetings on occasion to focus on specific ministry objectives. Most meetings will be fairly short, and it might be difficult for you to focus on a certain topic for the time needed to consider it well.

These extended meetings might take the form of a quarterly half-day retreat or an annual planning session. This may look different based on the size, budget, and availability of leaders. It's vital that you consider who is best to invite to these meetings. There is nothing worse than blocking out an entire day and having the wrong people in the room to consider a big topic. Don't try to do too much in these settings. Find one primary focus, and spend the time you've allocated tackling this one, specific objective.

Conclusion

Meetings get a bad rap. But the truth is, you cannot lead toward your God-given mission without them. And I would go so far as to say, you cannot build a healthy team culture without them. If you don't meet with your team, it will lead to poor communication, isolation, confusion, and disunity. Meetings that are not led well can add to these same outcomes. It is therefore essential that you grow zeal for the mission God has given you—and that you grow in the competency of leading meetings that yield highly productive teams.