

10 Tips for Adding Spark to Your Meetings

by David Saxby

1. Avoid meetings.

The word 'meeting' sends shivers down a person's spine. Many of us have wasted a good portion of our life attending poorly run meetings. Ask yourself, "What happens without it?" If your answer is, "Nothing," then don't call the meeting. Badly run meetings waste time, money, resources, and are worse than having no meetings at all.

Change the name from meeting to something more inviting but don't mislead participants.

2. Communicate in an Interesting and Inviting Way

Send out a notice and reminder and an agenda well in advance. Make the invite visually appealing and informative. If you have a speaker for the meeting include their bio, a photo and an interesting (benefit oriented) statement about why members should attend.

Set an agenda and stick to it. Start on time and end on time..

Everyone knows an agenda leads to an effective meeting yet, many people "save time" by neglecting to prepare an agenda. A meeting without an agenda is like a journey without a map. It is guaranteed to take longer and produce fewer results.

Ask participants for input into the agenda. Ask them at the end of the meeting what they liked or disliked – what can be improved next time (this can be called for the good of the club or group). Be open to the feedback you might not like everything you hear. Remember feedback is the breakfast of champions. If you ask, make sure you implement the suggestions if they will genuinely improve meetings.

3. Ignite Involvement

From the moment the meeting begins engage your audience, especially the newcomers.

Give people a reason for being there. People are more willing to show up and really be present at a meeting if they know they are going to be called upon to do something.

Existing members of an organization can become complacent if they are not challenges to think, asked to get involved or invited to give their input as to what they feel would make the meetings more effective.

4. Get Creative.

The best way to kill an idea is to take it to a meeting. Avoid boring and routine. Many organizations become complacent in planning meetings and as a result meetings become a painful experience. Inject fresh ideas. Here's some ways you can be creative:

- Have a theme for the meeting.
- Have a word of the day. Get everyone to use the word when they speak about agenda items at the meeting.
- Present interesting news, tips, hot business idea of the day.
- Have a good news session.
- Run a backwards meeting or start a meeting in the middle of the agenda
- Hold a 'brainstorming' meeting where attendees come up with ideas to improve the organization or meetings.
- Send your members to other meetings, have them bring back the best ideas to implement them in your organization.
- Being flexible. Don't get stuck with routine just because "it's always been done that way".
- Change the chair of the meeting. To see the big picture and to create enthusiasm, some organization encourage job trading. Many of the members of an organization have no idea what goes on behind the scenes in an organization until they get asked to participate.

5. Create an environment of fun.

- Have a contest
- Have everyone discuss an open ended grabber topic: my favorite TV show is... because...or one thing you may not know about me is...
- **Bring your inner child to the meeting.** Have a fun first-aid kit. Toys are becoming very cool to bring into meetings these days. They provide; instant access to creativity, diffuse anxiety, provide mental breaks, are tactile and help to engage whole brain thinking, they become useful visual aids and metaphors and they are memorable.
- Avoid the joke of the day, with access to the internet everyone has probably heard it before. If you do use jokes be careful to avoid gender bashing, racist or otherwise offensive humour. People may laugh but they may feel uncomfortable after.
- Use funny quotes, funny stories, ask you members or participants to talk about funny things that have happened to them - get an idea of the topic in advance (make sure it's something that can be talked about in a mixed crowd) and set a time limit for them to share the story.
- Humour is a great energizer, it increases endorphins in the brain.
- Be careful to avoid embarrassing anyone.

6. Change the Playground

A change of environment can change attitudes and complacency. Hold the meeting in a different location – do a tour, visit a business, have an activity, join with another group or organization, hold a networking function to introduce new people to your organization. Invite spouses or have a special ‘invite a guest’ event.

7. Be dramatic. Use the Show and Tell Approach

Each of us gather information and learn differently. Audiences and memberships are made up of individuals who have different styles of communication.

Dr. Albert Merabian determined that groups are generally made up of 15% auditory learners, 55% visual learners and 35% Kinesthetic learners (people who gather information or learn a new concept by seeing hearing and then applying the idea). If you want your audience to stay engaged you need to appeal to all three styles.

Storytelling is one of the best ways to teach concepts or speak about benefits about your business or organization. As children we learned from stories. Make sure your story is interesting and captivating and has a point. For example, if one of your members generated some valuable business or created a great friendship/relationship from being involved with your group tell the story. Guests or new members will see the value in being involved with your organization.

8. Ditch the ‘Geek’ Speak, Insider Language or Insider Humour

If you want to attract and retain people at meetings avoid conversations using acronyms, jargon, insider language or inside humour. These things turn people off. If someone doesn't understand the language let them know in plain language what you are saying. Adults don't like to feel left out or feel like they are stupid because they don't understand. If they don't understand they usually protest with their feet – they leave and don't come back.

9. Avoid Cliques

Make sure every new invitee is introduced to a long-term member. Have that member become the go-to person, their meeting buddy, for the guest, so they will feel welcome.

Avoid insider groups that exclude people.

To avoid cliques you can get people to participate in an ice-breaker such as introducing themselves to someone they don't know well. Have them sit together and share ideas, swap stories or participate in an exercise.

After the meeting follow up with new attendees to check their impression and to answer any questions they have.

10. Hire a great speaker

A professional speaker can enhance attendance, increase enthusiasm and provide genuine value for an audience.

If you can't afford to hire a speaker and you are trying to bring someone in for free give them a genuine (what's in it for them) reason for speaking to your audience...make certain that they can speak and they are prepared in advance. Give them as much information about your organization and the members as you can well in advance. Contact us for a free article [10 tips for hiring the right speaker.](#)

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