

# COMMANDING THE ROOM FOR AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

## HOLDING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

All productive meetings begin in the same way: planning. Lack of preparation is the main reason why meetings fail. When officers and members of an organization wait until an hour before a meeting to think about what they want to accomplish and how they will do so, the results are often disastrous. Instead, planning should take place well in advance of the meeting. You may want to consider creating a shared electronic agenda that all officers can edit in advance of the meeting and set a clear deadline.

## MEETING SPACE

Environment has a significant effect on behavior. Thinking and participating are easier when people are comfortable. Therefore, you should select and arrange your meeting space with care. Be sure the room is the right size. A room that is too small can become stuffy and create tension. On the other hand, a room that is too large will feel empty. The room should have adequate ventilation and lighting and be free from extraneous noise. This may also mean planning well in advance by booking rooms in your student center or university center for consistency. You may want to consider doing this for the President who takes over for you when your term ends to set them up for success.

Try to arrange the seating in a u-shape or hollow-square. This allows members to see one another and participate. If you can, provide table space so that members can write and take notes. If this is not possible, at least have a table for the executive board and any other key chairman that may be taking notes. For important meetings with a number of items to vote on, it might even be good to consider getting a projector so everyone can see the legislation or items being voted on.

## AGENDA

The agenda is the "blueprint" for your meeting. It is a list of the various topics your group will discuss during the meeting. If there are no topics to be discussed, there is no need for a meeting. An agenda ensures that your meeting has a purpose and that everyone knows what its specific objectives are. Stick to the agenda, otherwise it will lose its purpose in the future.

The agenda and any related items for the meeting should be available to all members at least a full day in advance. You can have a shared online drive for this purpose or send it out to all members in an email. Announcement should be added to these agendas in advance as well.

## RULES

During the first meeting, ground rules must be established that will last throughout your term.

Some things to consider - :

- How will you handle someone arriving late?
- How are people expected to dress?
- Are phones and computers allowed to be out and/or used?
- Will people be asked to submit reports and proposals in writing? How many days in advance?
- How will the group decide if a long discussion should be continued, postponed, or terminated?
- Will the group depend upon volunteers for most of its work or will someone have the authority to appoint people?
- What will the group do if the meeting runs beyond the stated time?

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Meetings throughout your term will include discussions on things that may seem mundane as well as very difficult conversations. In either case, it is easy to forget the basic principles that make a meeting productive. You will want to keep these things in mind to keep the command of the room.

- Make sure common courtesy is shown by every member to every member. Interrupting someone, leaving the room frequently, and whispering while someone else is talking all show disrespect for guests and fellow members.
- Listen carefully to what is being said and discussed. Be sure you have heard and understand what others have said before making a response.
- Stay involved. Ask questions if you do not understand a perspective or a point that a member has raised.
- Take responsibility for what is happening. If you believe something is wrong with the meeting, discuss it with the group, make a decision, and move on.
- Anticipate questions that might come from members and have an answer prepared in advance. You should work with your executive board to determine if there is consensus before speaking for all leadership.
- Thank members and guests for attending.
- Finish on time. Respect the time of your chapter members.

## AFTER THE MEETING

If the meeting has been especially long or difficult, officers and members often breathe (this is correct) a collective sigh of relief when it's over and move on to something else. However, here are some things that need to be handled after adjournment:

- You should consider talking with officers to evaluate the meeting to see what can be improved.
- The secretary distributes minutes within two or three days of the meeting.
- The secretary puts unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Make sure to follow up with individuals who have been delegated responsibilities.

## COMMANDING THE ROOM CHEAT SHEET

- Arrive early along with the rest of your executive board(at least 15 minutes)
- Make sure your meeting space is prepared.
  - Test all AV if applicable
- Have an agenda
  - Make sure to have copies or access for all members and special guests
- Place all copies of materials that members will need out and in the front of the room
- Greet all members and special guests as they enter the room
- Establish meeting rules and post these rules
- Begin the meeting on time
- Stick to the agenda
- End the meeting on time
- Meet quickly with the executive board members to discuss how the meeting went
- Make a list of any items that weren't addressed
- Follow up with the secretary immediately to ensure the meeting minutes are sent out
- Clean up the room if needed
- Stick around for at least 15 minutes to be available for questions

