

The Executive's Guide to Leading Meetings Your Team Will Actually Look Forward To



by Melissa Dinwiddie of

Creative Sandbox™
SOLUTIONS

Let's face it—most meetings suck.

Too often there's no specific purpose, and even if there is, there's no agenda, and no respect for everyone's time.

No-one is prepared, there are unnecessary people in the room, there's a cadre of attendees at one end of the table being disrespectful, or who are simply absorbed in their devices or side conversations, and the one person who is actually focused invariably monopolizes the meeting!

And then just as you're getting back on track, somebody pulls the conversation onto a 20-minute off-topic detour.

Meanwhile, the PowerPoint just put everyone to sleep, and isn't it time for a bathroom break already?

At the end of it all, there's no summary, and no follow-up.

What a pointless waste of time!

Of course, you can't run a company without meetings. But meetings don't have to suck!

That's why I've put together this guide (with my hand-drawn graphics) to help you lead meetings that not only avoid these problems, but people will actually look forward to attending.

Enjoy!

Melissa Dinwiddie



Awesome Meetings: The Basics

You've already determined the meeting has to happen, and you've determined face-to-face is the best way to accomplish your goal (rather than email or a conference call).

You'll be ahead of the pack with this checklist:

1. Determine the meeting's purpose

Determine the meeting's specific outcome before scheduling it. The 4 best purposes for a meeting are to:

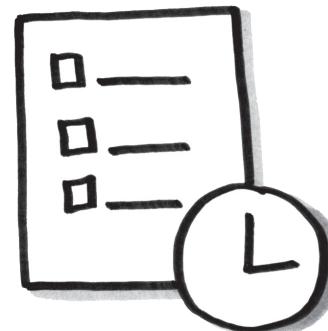
- Solve a problem
 - Make a decision
 - Develop a plan
 - Answer a question
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2. Have an Agenda

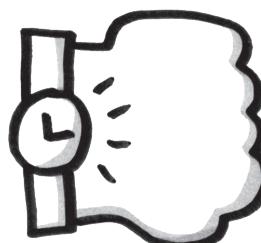
Every meeting needs a written Agenda, including:

- Start and end times
 - Every item to be discussed
 - Who is required to be there for each item
 - A time limit for the discussion of each item
 - What action is needed for each item:
 - What problem gets solved
 - What decision gets made
 - What plan gets developed
 - What question gets answered
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3. Respect everyone's time

Start on time. Stay on time. End on time. (Or better yet, end early.) Accomplish the meeting's purpose in as little time as required.



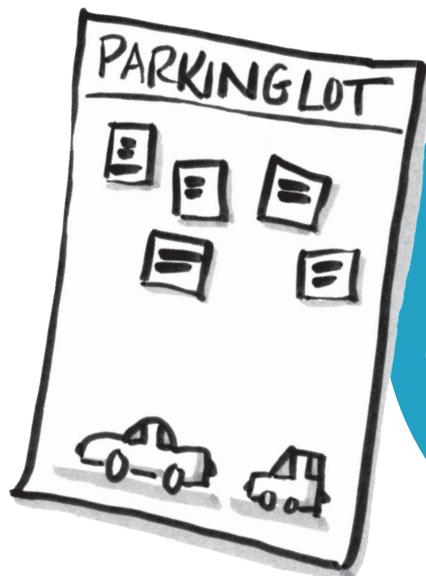
4. Be prepared (and set everyone else up for success, too)

Send out the Agenda at least 5 work days before the meeting so attendees can be adequately prepared to participate. And hold accountable those who are not adequately prepared.



BONUS TIP:

*Follow the approach used in Obama's White House, and have a **phone drop protocol**. Have attendees attach yellow sticky notes with their names to their devices and leave them in a basket before entering the room. Be sure to set a good example and be the first person to leave your phone in the basket!*

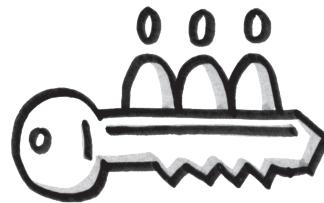


BONUS TIP:

*Keep a **parking lot**! If an important but off-topic issue is raised, put it in the parking lot. This way you acknowledge its importance, but don't take up valuable meeting time to resolve it. Just make sure to establish a time to address it later.*

5. Only invite necessary people

Attendees should only be there when they are needed to help solve the problem, make the decision, develop the plan, or answer the question. When they've completed their part in the meeting, they should leave.



6. Keep everyone focused on the Agenda and moving forward

You'll find this much easier if you keep handheld devices and laptops out of your meetings.



7. Set good ground rules

Ground rules define agreed upon behaviors and processes to make the meeting more effective. These can should clearly specify no side conversations, no interrupting or other disrespectful behaviors.



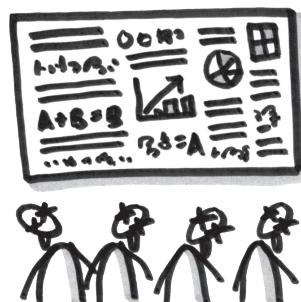
8. Spread the wealth

To prevent any one attendee from monopolizing the meeting, make it clear that you'll be giving people a time limit of no more than 5 minutes on an Agenda item, and then stick with it! (Use a timer.)



9. Prevent Death by PowerPoint

Keep it simple. Nobody uses PowerPoint well, and besides, everyone is on their screens all day long—the last thing they need is more screen time. Ditch the slides and use a flip chart. Really.



BONUS TIP:

I kid you not, if you draw an ugly circle, a crappy arrow, or a lousy stick figure, it will engage people 1,000 times more than even the best PowerPoint. People are so jaded and fatigued by digital these days, if you pick up a pen and start making marks they will not be able to take their eyes off you! Try it. I double-dog dare you!



10. Don't forget to give people a break!

If it's a long meeting, attendees need a 20-minute break every 90 minutes. 15 minutes for the bathroom and to check email, and 5 minutes to be physical.



11. Summarize

Make sure someone (other than the Meeting Leader) takes notes about:

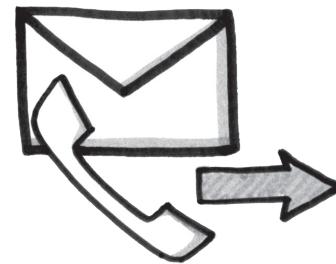
- ✓ What decisions were made,
- ✓ What problems were solved,
- ✓ What plans were developed,
- ✓ What questions were answered
- ✓ What future actions will be taken
 - By when
 - By whom



Within 72 hours after the meeting, be sure to create a 1-page Meeting Summary/Action Plan and send it to the attendees and others who need to know what occurred at the meeting.

12. Follow up

Follow up to ensure every person knows their part in the Action Plan and takes the necessary steps. Then determine if another awesome meeting is necessary.



Ready for More? Extra Tips to Take Your Meetings *Beyond Awesome*

To take your meetings from awesome to beyond awesome, add these tips to the mix:

13. Consider time of day

Avoid scheduling your meeting within the first 30 minutes or the last hour of the day, when people are transitioning into or out of work. It can make all the difference in their ability to A) *be on time*, and B) *focus*.



14. Inject humor

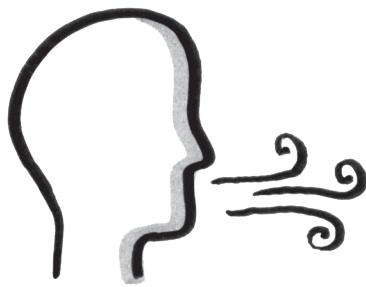
Suzanne Bates, founder of Bates Communications, who coaches executives, says, "Humor actually increases your stature as a leader. If you can warm up the room and make people smile, you stand out. You gain the respect of your colleagues, you appear confident and in control."

A colleague of hers put it this way: "Who looks like a leader—the person who is stiff and formal, or the one who can help the whole group loosen up?" (If you want to learn how to be funnier, especially in front of an audience, check out [Do You Talk Funny?](#) by David Nihill.)



15. Start with a personal check-in

It's hard to participate fully when you're not fully present, mentally speaking. Anyone who's ever meditated knows the power even a few deep breaths can have to bring us back from frazzled and focused. With that in mind, before you walk into a meeting, close your eyes, inhale three times, and ask yourself how you're feeling.



More important than how you're feeling is *why* you're feeling that way.

To take this check-in a level further, try this version from the Travis CI Blog:

Have everyone take three deep breaths. Then go around the table and have everyone share how they're feeling, using the following scale, along with a brief description of why.

Red means you're in a very emotional state (angry or frustrated), you're not feeling well, or you're sick.

Yellow means you're not fully present. Perhaps you're distracted or tense.

Green means you're A-okay. Calm, fully present, thinking clearly, feeling productive and well-rested.

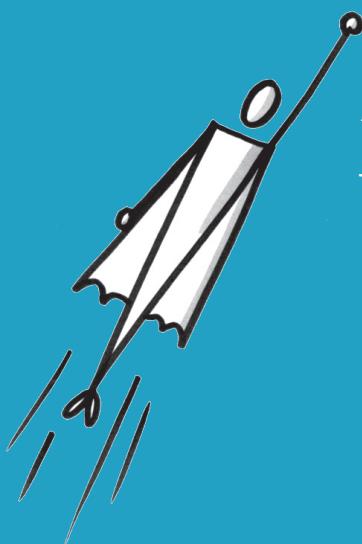
Each person decides for themselves the amount of detail to divulge. The point is simply to provide context, so everyone has an understanding of where everyone else is at.

Why do this activity?

- It normalizes open vulnerability, which helps build trust in a team.
- It sets the stage for the meeting. Context is everything.
- It humanizes work. Yes, it's important to be professional, but presence, focus, and general well-being are affected by your personal life. We are humans, not machines, and this activity reminds us of that.

16. Appreciate your peeps!

At the start of the meeting, pick someone in the room and tell them something you appreciate about them. Maybe they went out of their way to take care of something outside of their job description. Or perhaps they cheered you up when you were having a rough day. Whatever it is, be specific and genuine in your appreciation.



BONUS TIP:

At the end of the meeting, ask if anyone would like to share appreciation for someone else in the room.

Why do this activity?

- ✓ Gratitude releases dopamine
- ✓ A grateful mindset increases productivity.
- ✓ You will help your colleagues feel more motivated

Hat tip to Nataly Kogan for this Gratitude Bookends tip on Happier.com

17. Start with wins

Follow this advice from Jeff Weiner of LinkedIn: "Before getting to business, ask everyone to share a personal victory and a professional achievement from the last week to give meetings a positive energy from the start."



Now what? Going for Gold!

When you start to solve the problem of awful meetings, there's so much more to consider...

Now that your team is gathered together and undistracted by their devices, you can see underneath the surface issues to dig at deeper questions:

How can you unlock your team's genius?

How can you leverage that genius to help you make sense of complex situations and act decisively?

That's my specialty.

I unleash creativity at every level workshops and offsites using play-applied improvisation, LEGO® facilitation.

People feel heard and respected brain.

A Global Study by Adobe found that businesses that invest in creativity are more likely to:

- ✓ Increase employee productivity (78%)
- ✓ Have satisfied customers (80%)
- ✓ Provide better customer experience (78%)
- ✓ Foster innovation (83%)
- ✓ Be financially successful (73%)

The immediate result is to help you tap the brilliance already present in the room to supercharge productivity and better navigate through rough, uncertain waters.

We also happen to have a blast at the same time.

(Don't be surprised if your team raves about our time together for months afterwards.)

If you'd like to learn more about how I can help unleash creativity in your company, email melissa@creativesandbox.solutions to set up a call.

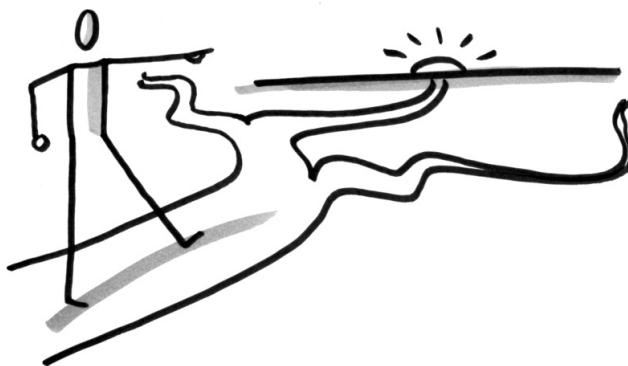


Click to watch me in action!

About Melissa

I'm an innovation strategist, facilitator, dot-connector, creativity instigator, creativity enabler. My superpower is catalyzing creativity, whether you believe you're creative or not.

My expertise lies in helping push to the fearlessness side of things to unleash innovative ideas all throughout your company.



As a professional artist and calligrapher for 15 years, I bring a creative outsider's perspective to your corporate setting, and channel my background into graphic facilitation, getting your team's ideas up on the wall in graphic form, so you can see the big picture, themes, AND gaps.

Using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, I help your team "think with their hands," getting their ideas out on the table in 3D.

With my background as a jazz singer and an improv performer, I can teach your team the skills that allow an ensemble to work together to create something under high-stakes contexts: collaboration, communication, having each others' backs, and leaning into uncertainty. (Can you say, "Leadership"?)

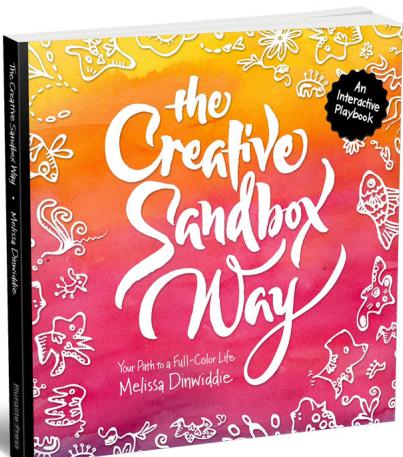
Benefits of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

- ✓ Helps participants access more of their brainpower
- ✓ Enhances memory and expression
- ✓ Depersonalizes the conversation
- ✓ Unlocks the wisdom of everyone in the room (not just dominant personalities)
- ✓ It's fun!

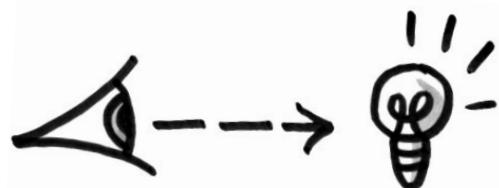
Before starting [Creative Sandbox Solutions™](#), I earned my Masters of Social Science at the University of Birmingham, England, and built a successful business as a freelance artist and calligrapher. My own experience with creative block led me to build another business, Living A Creative Life, helping people get creatively unstuck, via online

courses, a membership community, and in-person workshops and retreats.

My front-of-room experience ranges from traveling the country teaching calligraphy, to speaking on stages from Connecticut to a packed house in Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley, to performing as a singer for audiences as big as 6,500. I currently perform improv with a number of different groups in the San Francisco Bay Area.



I'm the author of [The Creative Sandbox Way™: Your Path to a Full-Color Life](#), and host of [The Creative Sandbox Way™ podcast](#). I live with my husband in Silicon Valley and spend my free time doodling, playing ukulele, or chasing kitty fluffs that have fallen off my Siberian cat, Nika.



I look forward to working with you!

Melissa

Ready to Unleash Creativity In Your Organization? Let's Chat!
[Click here to schedule a call](#)

