

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

For the word "group", you can substitute "committee", "board", "council", or whatever. The items are guides, not rules.

1. Pay attention to the physical setting. Make sure the room is quiet and without distractions, is well-ventilated (to minimize drowsiness) and well-lit (to prevent headaches).
2. Start with an agenda to which everyone agrees. Put items needing mental energy, bright ideas, and clear heads high on the agenda. The early part of a meeting tends to be more lively and creative than the end.
3. Begin and end the meeting with an item that unites the group. This creates an atmosphere of goodwill.
4. Budget the time, avoiding lengthy and senseless deviations, yet recognize new issues when they arise. Having a pre-established ending time makes members more sensitive to the time and keeps the discussion on target.
5. Pay attention to seating arrangements. Ideally everyone should be able to see everyone else.
6. Practice consensus-building, encouraging individuals to contribute, to criticize, and to take the time to make group decisions through individual reasoning and sharing of ideas.
7. Ask the opinion of the most senior committee members last. If their ideas are introduced too early, discussion may be stifled.
8. When necessary, take immediate steps to lessen hostility, ill-feeling, or misunderstanding among members. When a clash of ideas becomes a clash of personalities, turn to a neutral member to dilute the confrontation.
9. Pause and summarize periodically, to keep members oriented to the task.
10. Encourage "quiet" members to contribute; verbal ability is not the only indicator of a valuable group member.
11. Control the gabbers and dominators. Some recommendations are:
 - Avoid arguing with them one-on-one.
 - Suggest that they write a paper for further study.
 - Write their idea on a chalk board or newsprint and then ask for others' ideas.
 - Repeat a phrase that they used and then call on someone else to save the discussion. For example: "'Inevitable decline.' That's very interesting, Jane. What do you think about that, Frank?"
 - If they interrupt, say "Wait a minute. Jane didn't get to finish. Let's hear what she has to say."
 - Seat dominators or antagonizers to the right of the chair so that eye contact is difficult. Avoid having them directly opposite. Seating a friendly member next to a dominator sometimes helps.