

A. Craft a Results-Oriented Agenda

Compile a “Let’s Leave With” List

When planning an agenda, the first thing to think about is the last thing you will do: **get up to leave**. Imagine this moment and answer these questions: *Which questions did we answer unambiguously? What decisions did we make? What shared understandings did we achieve?*

For example, you might leave with:

- Agreement on the root causes of our weakening cash flow *so that...*we can take action before it becomes a crisis.
- A decision to select a contractor *so that...*we can start construction next month.
- Understanding of board member questions about a proposed project *so that...*we draw on all of our expertise.

Consider next how you hope group members will **feel** as the meeting ends. For example, you might leave with:

- Satisfaction that our meetings run efficiently **and** we hear all voices *so that...*we look forward to board meetings.
- Confidence that we can produce important results *so that...*we address tough issues promptly and head-on.

Edit the list according to the strength of each statement. Scrutinize the weak ones: *Is there any reason to spend time on this one now?* Defer or discard those. Put the keepers in order of importance, those that are urgent or need action early in the meeting. Others are included to generate later conversations and decisions.

Draft, Revise & Finalize the Agenda

Set up each agenda item as one or several questions to focus attention on each “Let’s Leave With” item. Estimate time allocations to encourage efficient conversation, but don’t plan a forced march. Anticipate fatigue and vary pace and rhythm to maintain interaction. Your agenda will be more like a jazz chart (with room for improvisation) than a fixed symphonic score.

B. Prepare the Meeting Space and Yourself

Tune the Room

Establish focal points. Arrange chairs and tables for comfort.

Set up healthy and satisfying refreshments. Set up a magic wall (or table or floor). Prepare and distribute paper, markers, color dots and sticky notes as needed. Adjust temperature and lighting.

Check Your Attitude and Readiness

Take a moment to breathe deeply, relax and focus on **this** meeting. Review the “Let’s Leave With” list and agenda. Be ready to improvise your agenda to accommodate important surprises.

C. Launch the Meeting with Warm-ups

Begin by making a series of agreements on the following topics. Supplement the examples shown with what works for you. Move forward once you reach consensus.

Have people show approval with a nod, thumbs-up or an audible reply.

1. Contract for Roles

As Chair, or facilitator, may I interrupt to keep us on track?

Every person can speak up if we stray from these agreements.

2. Agenda and “Let’s Leave With” list

Preview and ask: *Do we agree to focus on this list and agenda?*

3. Things That Will HELP our Work

Speak so all can hear. Explain your reasoning and intent. Focus on the “Let’s Leave With” list (speak up if we wander).

4. Things That Will HINDER our Work

Speeches and side conversations (catch yourself, or one of us will).

Holding back your thoughts. Electronic interruptions.

5. Agree on Decision-making Techniques

Establish how or when you will use consensus, voting or delegation for further consideration.

6. Describe Tools

Magic Wall (or table or floor). Clearly write one comment per half-sheet (landscape). Use colors as needed. Post and explain them one-by-one. Silent time is for thinking.

7. Explain Logistics

Bathrooms. Refreshments - serve yourself anytime. HVAC and lighting comfort.

8. Do Introductions...Every Time!

Name and affiliation, plus a one-word or one-sentence response to a question that reveals a perspective or attitude relevant to the agenda, recent events or group dynamics.

D. Manage the Meeting with Agreements

Every one of the agreements you made during warm-ups is a facilitation tool during the meeting. If reminding a participant of his or her earlier agreement (not to make speeches, for example) doesn't work, reach for one of these:

- Say “What’s Going On” and ask “What’s Going On”
- Get curious: *What causes you to make that statement, or disagree with...*
- Ask for agreement to revise agenda timing based on realities of the meeting

E. Close the Meeting with Wrap-ups

Revisit the “Let’s Leave With” list:

- *Which ones did we accomplish?*
- *Which ones should return next meeting?*
- Make it a habit to ask two questions. Even in routine meetings, you’ll learn something valuable from this two-minute vital-sign check-up.
- **Plus:** *What worked well in this meeting?*
- **Delta:** *Next time we meet, it will be better if...what?*
- Encourage people to offer one- or two-word answers as you write them down. Move along briskly. [Use Plusses and Deltas when planning the next agenda.]
- Finally, adjourn exactly on time, or a few minutes early. They’ll thank you for a great meeting!

