

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1098 Why More People Don't Participate in Meetings — Part 2

So, people aren't taking part in meetings the way you want them to? There could be very good reasons why they don't, and likely won't. There also could be ways to overcome their resistance. I'm Jerry Roberts and part two of our chat about getting folks to participate more in meetings is coming next, on The Extra Point.

Yesterday, we began to explore the reasons why some workers refuse to get involved in meetings. Oh, they sit there, nod, take notes, but don't volunteer ideas and opinions. They let others carry the ball.

Reason #1 cited was fear. They don't want to be seen as being wrong, and they sure don't want to be ridiculed for what they have to say.

Reason #2 was they may not have a solid understanding of the subject or issue you're dealing with. They don't feel comfortable chiming in because of that. This is also part of the fear equation.

You beat this by helping them to prepare ahead of the meeting, making sure they are ready to contribute.

Today, let's add:

Reason #3, they may have felt intimidated in past meetings with the way their contributions were challenged.

I was once a guest in a meeting hosted by a high-ranking military officer, who had called in his division officers to report on progress. He asked a question of one, and did not like the answer. In fact, he strongly disputed the man's contention. He essentially browbeat this man over several minutes with a rant of sorts, until the junior officer just said, "Yes sir, I understand your point."

The senior officer then proceeded to ask questions of the other officers, and it was easy to see that all of them were now very nervous and were seemingly trying to give answers that would be in line with what the commander believed — and hopefully wouldn't result in him barking at them like he did the first man.

Nothing says you have to accept a worker's answer to your question, or a position taken. That said, the way you respond will determine how people feel about contributing to your meetings in the future.

If your meetings have always been a one-man or one-woman show — starring you — then don't expect people to jump in just because you give them the opportunity. You're going to have to build that up over time.

Reason #4 — People may be disappointed that none of their past ideas and solutions were used...so why should they get involved again?

There's some psychology at work here. If you make the effort to get your workers to step up in meetings and they do...and they give you any kind of decent input — you must make it your business to find a way to pay off on that by using something they give you.

Even if it's the lowest of the low-hanging fruit, costs next to nothing, and won't really move the bar for the organization...do it anyway. It says you listened, and that could be enough to get people to give it another go in your next meeting. Maybe something better will come from that one.

I suggest you have somebody take notes to log what was said, and who said it. You could add a nice touch by sending a post-meeting email to thank each person for participating, along with a specific comment in response to something the individual offered in the session. (Con't.)

There's some work involved, but that kind of special effort can have impact.

One more thing, if you have always been the leader of your organization's meeting, give some thought to sharing that responsibility.

What if you build the agenda, but each time a different person leads the meeting? Is that scary?

Here's what I know for sure. If you keep running meetings the way you've always run meetings — and you're not happy with the results you're getting — well, then you're not going to be happy about your future meetings, either.

Try something different, and keep at it. One day soon, I'm confident you'll see results.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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