

How to set better agendas:

TalkWise Worksheet

A common recommendation on how to improve meetings is to ensure that they have a clear agenda. Other bits of good advice then include sticking to that agenda and making sure that you deal with the most important items first. But here's a further suggestion that can make a huge difference when it comes to making meetings more productive.

Frame your agenda items as issues rather than topics. That way your meetings can be kept much more to the point. This worksheet will help you to do this by thinking through what you are trying to achieve, and which voices can support you to do so. Work through the following steps.

1. Articulate the reason for your meeting. Write it down here.

2. Is your agenda simply a list of topics? This does not give your meeting enough clarity of purpose. **Use the exploring voices** to turn the broad subject area into a much more specific articulation of what aspect of that topic needs to be discussed now. Probing and diagnosing questions are particularly helpful. Try these:

- Why do we need to talk about this subject now?
- What is it about this topic that needs our attention?
- What exactly is the problem (or opportunity) that needs to be discussed?

3. Consider what sort of meeting is needed, to address the issues you have now identified.

Is it about sharing information, exploring different views, weighing options, or reaching a decision? It may be one or more of these, but without clarity on which it is, your meeting is likely to become unfocused and unproductive. Try answering these questions:

- How will talking about this help us to achieve our goals and objectives?
- What sort of conversation does this issue need now?

4. Choose action verbs that indicates the nature of the meeting, and the sort of talking that each agenda item will require. For example, if your meeting is about personal development courses, are you inviting people to:

- Discuss costs and benefits of sponsoring personal development courses
- Attend presentation + Q & A with some of our sponsored students, or
- Decide whether to stop sponsoring personal development courses?

The first invites the offering and consideration of both facts and opinions, and is an essentially investigative discussion. The second is primarily an occasion for listening, inquiring and reflecting. The third makes the need to come to a conclusion more immediate, so it is a meeting where any disagreements need to be not only aired but also resolved.

Write your agenda items again, with relevant action verbs:

5. And finally, with these things in place in your agenda, you can more easily use the Direct and Challenge voices to ensure the standard and relevance of the meeting. Make a few notes about how you might use these voices, should you need to bring people back to the meeting purpose.