

Superintendents' Training - Lesson 2

The Agenda

To support your personal growth, we recommend that you develop an album of your lessons, responses to the questions, and your selection of reporting activities. Include your personal objectives, prayer requests, and answers to those prayers.

Lesson 2: Be a Smooth Operator: Learning effective tips for meetings—preparing, chairing, etc.

Objectives

As a result: of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Determine and implement an effective meeting schedule.
- Write an effective, comprehensive agenda.
- Balance the importance of an agenda and minutes.
- Find help for pre- and post-meeting tasks.

Resources

“Groups,” the guidelines for effective group participation, January 1998-September 2000, especially the following: parliamentary procedures, May 2000, p. 18; discussion evaluation, August 2000, p. 18; participation, July 2000, p. 20. For back issues, order through your Adventist Book Center or by calling 1-800-456-3991.

Introduction

“I don’t get any help. I have to do everything myself.” This is the challenge of many leaders. You too?

Of course, lots of people hate committees and, to be honest, there are many, many useless, boring meetings. It is also true that there are meetings that are action-oriented, energizing, and Spirit-filled. The challenge is to meet successfully. The key is to learn and use effective methods. The following tips help you become a smooth—or smoother—operator.

How Long?

A good meeting takes about 90 minutes to two hours. Start on time. Quit on time. Use an agenda.

Quality time is important to building team spirit and making good decisions. If your group is initially unwilling to spend two hours a month, then bargain with them for a two-hour meeting once a quarter.

How Often?

Monthly. The standard expectation is once a month. If you meet less often, the

interval between meetings is so long that group members put off their assignments and then forget about them until the last minute.

Yearly. If your group is not used to meeting regularly, I would recommend that you start with a once-a-quarter schedule. When your meetings prove effective and your ministry grows, the time will come when the group is ready to meet more often and the meetings are actually needed.

Quarterly. On a quarterly meeting schedule, you will need to make phone calls to all of the members about a month ahead of each meeting to remind them of their assignments.

Don't be afraid to cancel meetings. If you are not prepared, or there is no real work to do, reschedule.

The Big Four

If you do not complete all four of these things, you are not likely to have a good meeting:

- 1 . **Get out the reminders.** Within *a few days after* each meeting, mail a list of the assignments. This can simply be a copy of the annotated agenda with names by assignments. This is much more important than minutes. In fact, if you cannot produce minutes, that is fine. Only the church board and official church business meetings must have minutes.
- 2 . **Mail the postcards.** About *two weeks before* each meeting, mail a postcard with a simple notice of the committee or group, time, date, and place. Also ask for RSVP to a phone number, perhaps one with an answering machine or a home-bound individual who can take messages for you.
- 3 . **Make those phone calls.** About *two days prior* to each meeting have someone make a phone call to each member, reminding them of the meeting. Get the services of a homebound person. *The person who makes the calls does not need to be a member of the group.* Ask someone who cannot get out to help the Sabbath School in other ways.
- 4 . **Pray.** Spend time in personal devotions asking for God's guidance as you prepare for and lead meetings and for God's blessing on the meeting itself. Find a prayer partner. The person does not need to be a committee member. In fact, your partner might even be someone way across the country with whom you communicate by phone, mail, or e-mail.

The Meeting Agenda

The meeting plan should be in writing with copies of the agenda passed out to everyone. If you cannot get it typed, then hand print it. If you cannot get it duplicated, then put it up on a flipchart or chalkboard. Here are nine pointers for

making your agenda work.

1 . **Be complete.** If the agenda lists “Fellowship,” then it should also say whether this is a report, a proposal, a topic for brainstorming, or a debriefing of a project that has been completed.

2 . **Be time-wise.** Each topic is categorized by tasks to be accomplished and a time frame is assigned. If the group gets done earlier than noted, they will feel good. If you run out of time on a given item, then ask the participants if they want to spend more time or take the vote. This is one of the major tools you have to move things along.

3 . **Pray.** Traditional committees begin with a perfunctory prayer, the minutes of the last meeting are read, and a financial report is made. Be different:

- Be informed. Begin with brief reports that allow each person to say a few words. Say something like “Before we have a time of prayer, I would like each of you to share a two-minute report on the assignment you’ve been working on since our last meeting. Then we can focus our prayers on our work.” Don’t let people launch into lengthy stories. Tell them, “We plan to talk more about that later. Right now we are just getting ready for prayer.”
- Make sure everyone talks. If people indicate that they have no report, then ask them, “Is there something you would like to mention for prayer?”
- Spend quality time. Prayer is not a ritual. If you have fewer than six or seven members, it might be well simply to go around and allow each person to pray. If you have eight or more members, you can ask a couple individuals to lead the group in prayer.

4 . **Debrief.** Ask persons in charge of recently completed activities to give detailed reports, including statistics and a financial report, when appropriate. Then spend time making two lists:

- A. Strengths: Things that were good about this project
- B. Weaknesses: Things we should do differently next time.

Encourage everyone to get involved in making the lists.

5 . **Note progress.** Ask each person who has an assignment to tell the group about the progress they’ve made toward the planned event or program activities. If a person needs help solving a problem, encourage the group to share ideas. Don’t let the group spend time arguing. If a person shares an opinion, just put it on the list.

6 . **Make major decisions.** Type out the topic on the agenda as a question, not a statement. Help the group to see both the question they must answer and the alternatives or options available to them.

7 . **Do long-range planning.** Begin to list some things you would like to accomplish in the coming year. It is best to work on long-range planning a little bit at every meeting, slowly developing ideas and assigning them to someone to do

some fact-finding and read available resource materials.

8 . Assign tasks. A very important item is to review the list of assignments that has been made throughout the meeting. Use a chalkboard or flipchart, and write down the name of each person in the group and then list the assignments each has. Be as specific as possible about what is to be accomplished before the next meeting.

9. Have the benediction. As the leader, you can have the closing prayer, asking for the Lord's blessing on the plans, decisions, and assignments that have been made. It is a good idea to stand for the benediction, because this gives everyone a clear signal that the meeting is over. Close the meeting quickly.

If you do the "big four" plus write the effective, comprehensive agenda—and follow it—you'll have a good meeting. If you do these things and have surprise refreshments (such as Sister Brown's peach cobbler at the end of the meeting), you will find that you'll have very good meetings—well attended, productive, Holy Spirit directed, and fun!

When You Talk to Small Groups

Some of the guidelines for presenting to a large audience don't apply when the group involves only a few people. *The differences:*

Realize that you won't get the jump-start applause that typically follows an introduction to a large group. In fact, you'll have to introduce yourself. Make it fast and businesslike. *Example:* "Thanks for giving me some of your time this morning."

Forget the notion that distributing handouts means they'll read them instead of listening to you. That's true with a large audience, but it's not a problem when the group is small.

Avoid saying "Feel free to interrupt." *Reason:* Those you're facing are likely the decision makers. As such, they may bristle if you imply that you'll view their suggestions as interruptions.

Keep this in mind if you're part of a presentation team: While one person presents, the others should occasionally nod agreement to what the teammate is saying.