

# Make Your Meetings Matter

By Dianna Booher

Meetings need not be the boring, repetitive, and work-generating events that professionals have learned to tolerate. They can be an excellent vehicle for airing grievances, debating policies, and proposing new ideas while key staffers and decision-makers are assembled and attentive. To the attendee who has something to say and can communicate it effectively, there is no more opportune time to make a point—and an impression.

## Take the Stage—Don't Just Drift In

When you intend to present an idea, take stage just as a performer does. None of this “Just a minute, before we continue. I’ve been thinking about something for a while.” Or “I’m not saying I disagree with what has already been said, but here’s just another thought about how we could approach the issue...”

Shakespeare was right, all the world is a stage. Those actors who wait for the opportune time or fearfully cower in the wings never get noticed. Those who confidently and competently play out their roles get the attention their ideas deserve.

## Be Conversational—Don't Move Into “Meeting Mode”

Regardless of the importance of the issue or the formality of the setting, use your conversational voice, not your lecture tone.

Not: “It is imperative that I inform you...” But: “You all need to know that ...” Not: “The research and development group of which I have been appointed chair, effective May 1, has asked that you be notified that the team is receptive to any and all proposals concerning...” But: “On May 1, R&D asked me to chair a team to come up with a solution. So, I’ll need your input on ...”

Consider yourself in a multiple-person conversation rather than “addressing a group.”

## Present Your Ideas Only One Way and Be Specific

It’s natural to think that the more general you can make your idea, the more “hooks” you’re creating for people to latch onto. However, a broad, generally expressed idea usually has the opposite effect: Everybody hears something they disagree with or can think of reasons why your suggestion won’t work.

Instead, propose your idea succinctly, in only one specific way, and let it stand there in all its glory until people ask you to add details by their comments and questions. Your proposals are far too important to leave to the guesswork of others. And others are too busy to wade through generalities.

## Listen to the Counters to Your Proposal

Don't get so carried away in preparing to defend your ideas when a person raises an objection that you miss what he or she says. If you do, you may find yourself focusing on an issue that the other person has just conceded or failing to respond at all to the new issues raised.

Active listening is not only polite, it is the most effective way of discovering the strengths and weaknesses of your ideas. Listening provides key insights about the receptivity of others so you can provide appropriate responses.

## End With Impact

When you present an idea, don't limp away with a sputter, drop your eyes, tune out with body language, or let others grab the floor and run away with your insights. Instead, summarize your idea, mentioning the pros and cons discussed and any decisions made, and suggest the next follow-up step.

The climactic car chase at the end of the movie, the compelling cross-examination by the prosecuting attorney to wrap up the case, and the last-second touchdown catch to secure a victory is what is most remembered. Avoid a routine, anticlimactic ramble. End with a wallop.

Your next meeting can be an opportunity to assert your views, display your expertise, and communicate your passion in front of the right people at the right time. When it's your turn to take the stage, make it count.

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277 words

***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." [www.booher.com](http://www.booher.com) or call 800.342.6621.*

*For more tips on effective meetings, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.*