



Chairing Meetings

This article aims to help you to consider how to effectively act as a chair of a meeting. It will guide you through some key questions to ask before, during, and after a meeting, in order to make your meetings as efficient and successful as possible.

Before the Meeting

One key to effective meetings is preparation. Here are some questions that would help the preparation:



- What is the purpose of the meeting? Or to put it another way, where should we be at the end of the meeting?

Some meetings are to make a decision, some to introduce an issue, some to progress an issue and some to build a sense of cohesiveness. Since most meetings deal with many items, you may well have some items that fall into each category. Once you know what you hope the meeting will do with each item, you can work towards that goal.

- What should the agenda look like?

The agenda is a map. Work with the clerk or secretary to draw up an agenda that will help people navigate the business. Most meetings take up most time on the first item(s). So, put important issues first. Put matters for discussion early on, and routine matters to the bottom. It's okay to have minutes towards the end.

- Where are people coming from?

Most church meetings take place in the evening. People arrive having had busy or boring days. Their minds aren't filled with God and thoughts of the Kingdom. How will you set the tone? A short, but appropriate, reading and prayer helps people shift gear. Singing a hymn or song is even better. Music helps people tune into a new wavelength quickly.

- What should the room look like?

The look of the room sets the tone. A circle is much more likely to encourage discussion than rows. People will relax more on soft seats than on hard ones. A cup of tea at the beginning gets people chatting but can also stop them getting down to business. So, use the best available room for your meeting, and think about what you can do with it to create the ambience you want.

During the Meeting

The most noticeable part of a chair's role is during the meeting. In a nutshell, the role is to facilitate not dominate. It is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to help people progress issues and reach decisions. People have different styles. There is no right style - try to be yourself. All effective styles have this in common:



- Ensuring order and fairness

The chair is in charge, deciding who will speak and when, creating space for discussion and enabling decisions to be made. A light touch is desirable. Occasionally someone may need to be reined in so that they don't dominate the discussion. Citing standing orders and rules is usually a recipe for trouble. If you are competent and composed, those at the meeting will relax and respect your chairing.

- The issue to be considered

Sometimes the chair will introduce the issue, outlining it briefly and suggesting matters for discussion. Other times it will be another person who will introduce the matter. If so, brief them beforehand and let them know how long they should speak for. If the matter is complicated, ask for a paper to be written and circulated beforehand. Listening to long presentations is a poor use of people's time.

- Participation

In a small meeting, everyone can contribute to each item. In a larger one, it is important to get a range of views. Some people can be over eager to contribute. A simple way of holding them back is avoiding eye contact. Another way is to ask people to turn to their neighbour and buzz about what they think before having a general discussion. Once someone has articulated their thoughts to their neighbour they are more likely to share it with the whole group.

- Timing

Begin your meeting at the stated time. If you wait for the latecomer, they will keep coming late. Meetings should finish on time. It would be useful to tell people how long a meeting will last for. If there is a lot of pressure on time, it would be good to share that timetable with everyone. This invites their help in keeping things moving.

- Decision

It may be obvious in some case that you can say, 'I sense that everyone thinks we should do X. Okay?' When it may not be obvious, you may need to state what the options are. Getting agreement on the options can be viewed as progress. Consensus is good, but sometimes voting is necessary. Deciding not to force a decision can be the best outcome.

After the Meeting

The third key to being an effective chair is follow-up after the meeting; what needs to be done? Who needs to do it? Do they know this? Can they be trusted to get on with things, or will they need a reminder?

There are things you may need to do as a chair; is there something you could do before the next meeting that might unlock an issue? Is there someone who was at the meeting who might need a little encouragement? Is there someone who needs to get something of their chest?

Further reading and resources

www.wikihow.com/Chair-a-Meeting

