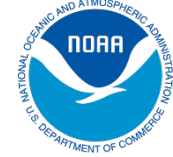


Engagement Practices

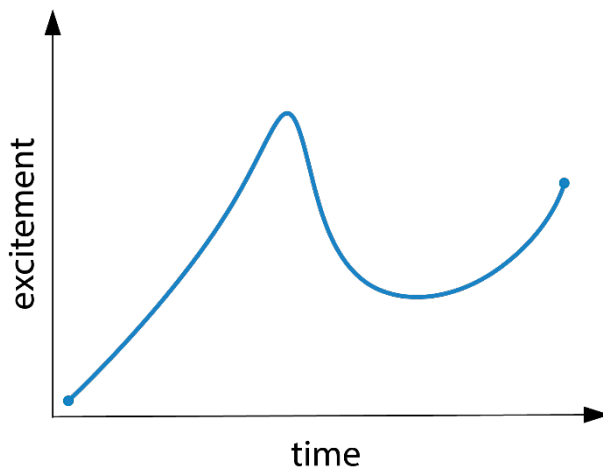
CLOSING A MEETING



Description

Effective meetings should end by systematically closing the conversation, ensuring that everyone has been heard, establishing that participants have agreed upon any next steps, and recognizing what the group has accomplished.

Most approaches to effectively closing meetings are based on the “peak-end rule,” which states that an event is not judged by the entirety of an experience, but by prototypical moments (or “snapshots”) that dominate the actual value of an experience. Fredrickson and Kahneman theorized that these snapshots were actually the average of the most effectively intense moment of an experience (the “peak”) and the feeling experienced at the end. This means that the end of the experience is critical in shaping the memory of it. Applying this concept to meetings suggests that it is critical to end meetings on a positive note.



Participants

The information here applies to groups of any size convened to have a discussion. In general, the smaller the group, the more personalized and specific you can make the closing.

Process

- **Provide key takeaways.** The leader should summarize the most important takeaways from the meeting.
- **Ensure completion.** The leader needs to make sure the group has had a chance to discuss all relevant parts of a topic. They can confirm completion by asking, “Is there anything else someone needs to say or ask before we change topics or adjourn the meeting?”
- **Set next steps.** The meeting leader should set clear deadlines and assign specific tasks to team members. In order for a conversation to lead to action, specific commitments must be made. They can ask the group: “What exactly will we do by our next meeting to ensure progress? Who will do it? By when?”
- **Set deadlines or check-ins.** This helps ensure the completion of actions items quickly and efficiently.
- **Recognize value.** Recognition motivates teams. Meetings are a good opportunity to validate a colleague's contribution by providing specific feedback on how he or she has added to a discussion or helped the participants make progress.

Activities

The following activities can help the group identify its key takeaways, and establish commitment for follow-up.

- **Dear boss activity.** Participants craft an email to their boss that describes what happened at the meeting, including any decisions that were made, insights gained, and next steps. The leader asks several participants to share as a way to close the meeting.
- **Trash talk.** Participants each write down one of their takeaways on a piece of paper and crumple it up. Standing in a circle, participants toss their paper ball across the circle. Everyone picks up a crumpled ball, opens it, and reads it. The leader calls on three participants to share what is on their paper. Those papers are set aside, and then the group crumples up the papers and tosses them again. Repeat.
- **1:4.** Ask participants to draw four columns on a sheet of blank paper. At the top of the 1st column add the heading “Fact,” at the top of the 2nd column add “Question,” at the top of column 3 add “Aha!” and add “Action” to the top of column 4. Ask participants to reflect upon the meeting, and in column 1 write one fact that they now know that they didn’t know before; in column 2 write one question they still have; in column 3 write one ‘Aha!’ moment; and in column 4 write what actions they will take as a result of their new discoveries. Ask the group to form teams of two or three and share the 1:4 sheets, adding anything they feel they missed that they learned in discussion.
- **Closing round.** Each participant has 20 seconds to comment on the meeting. There is no discussion or back-and-forth allowed.

- **Future me.** Give participants postcards or paper for a letter. Each participant must write at least one thing they want to achieve in the month to come, as well as where they can be contacted in one month. The leader will gather these postcards or letters and mail them to the participants after one month to see if they have achieved their goal.
- **Group mural.** Tape to a wall approximately four flipcharts, depending on how many participants you have for the training. At the end of the meeting, ask everyone to draw one thing learned during the course of the meeting. Ask participants to interpret each other's drawing.

Tips

- Make sure to allocate time for a robust closing activity.
- Gauge the energy level of the participants and match that to the closing activity.
- Match the closing activity to the objectives of the meeting (e.g., if a training, focus on what was learned; if it was to decide upon a course of action, focus on what was agreed to; etc.).
- Do not neglect to ask for feedback on the meeting, either during the closing or afterwards.
- Make sure to thank everyone for participating in the meeting.

Benefits

Effective closings help participants feel like time was well spent and ensure that the group understands what was agreed to, as well as next steps. What did you learn about the issue?

Materials Needed

Depends upon which closing activity is chosen.

Additional Information

- "The Right Way to End a Meeting" by Paul Axtell (March 11, 2015) in *Harvard Business Review* at hbr.org/2015/03/the-right-way-to-end-a-meeting.
- "7 Ways to End Every Meeting on a Positive Note: How You End Your Meeting May Be More Important than How You Start Them" by Peter Economy (May 19, 2016) in *Inc.* at inc.com/peter-economy/7-effortless-ways-to-end-every-meeting-on-a-positive-note.html.
- "How to be a Pro at Closing Meetings" by bfield (February 8, 2016) at meetingresult.com/how-to-be-a-pro-at-closing-meetings.
- "7 Ways to End a Meeting the Right Way" at Staples Business Hub at staples.com/sbd/cre/tech-services/explore-tips-and-advice/tech-articles/7-ways-to-end-a-meeting-the-right-way.html.

- “3 Tips for Happy, Effective Meetings” by Susanna Halonen in Happyologist blog at happyologist.co.uk/workplace/3-tips-for-happy-effective-meetings.
- “How to End Every Meeting: Giving Everyone a Last Word” by Ev Williams at <https://medium.com/@ev/how-to-end-every-meeting-a0b7bc1eb86f>.
- “10 Ways to End Your Meetings on Time” at Craig Jarrow's Time Management Ninja (March 1, 2012) at timemanagementninja.com/2012/03/10-ways-to-end-your-meetings-on-time.
- “The Best Way to End Meetings: Step One Is Making Sure Everyone Has Been Heard” at EAB Daily Briefing (March 16, 2015) at eab.com/daily-briefing/2015/03/16/the-best-way-to-end-meetings.
- “Memorable Debriefs” from Office O2xygen at blog.trainerswarehouse.com/memorable-debriefing.
- “Closing Ideas: Facilitation Tips, Tools and Techniques” at uvm.edu/sites/default/files/closing-ideas.pdf.
- “8 Ideas to Close Your Training Session” at Trainers Advice (May 18, 2012) at trainersadvice.com/8-ideas-to-close-your-training-session.