Communications

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Checklist for Planning A Successful Meeting

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Much time, energy and other resources go into planning and holding meetings. The purpose of a meeting should be to bring about desired change in a specific group of people or target audience. This change could be in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or aspirations. A meeting can be judged successful to the extent planned objectives are reached. Success is viewed from both the standpoint of those planning the meeting and the target audience.

Good meetings aren't accidents—they are caused by good planning. Probably 50 percent of meetings are "bores." Chairs are like T-squares, air is bad, a sleepy atmosphere prevails, and after a long hour talk, there is no time or energy for questions.

To help in planning meetings, here is a checklist of major elements essential for success.

Planning for the Meeting

___ • Decide a meeting is the most effective method to provide the desired learning experience.

___ • Effectively involve a planning committee including representatives of those expected to attend.

___ • Define in writing the objective that is to be reached. This should include: (a) the audience to be reached, (b) the behavioral change expected, and (c) what is to be taught.

The Audience

___ • The audience is the individual or group who is to attend. Many times meetings are called with only a general or vague idea of who is to attend. Sometimes the message is defined first and sometimes the audience. In all cases clearly define the message, the audience, and their interdependence.

Defining and Presenting the Message

___ • Decide on the techniques (ways) to present the meeting message to most effectively bring about desired change in the audience. Techniques have been likened to a vehicle which helps move a group toward its goal.

Some of the techniques that can be used are: lecture, movie, slide-cassette, video-cassette, tape recording, buzz groups, question and answer session, panel, posters, written materials, and demonstration. The techniques used should be those that will have the greatest impact on the audience to accomplish the meeting objective. Audience participation tends to increase learning or desired change.

The Meeting Place

___ • Select a meeting place that best matches the audience, message, and desired techniques. Give consideration to: size, comfort, seating arrangement, easy to hear, easy to see, easy to get to, adequate parking facilities, meeting place "acceptable" to the group, can be darkened if desired, well ventilated, and conducive for audience to communicate among themselves. If meeting place is larger than needed, stack extra chairs or rope off back rows.

Meeting Responsibilities Assigned and Accepted

___ • Those expected to help have been involved in planning the meeting. There should be a mutual undestanding of the purpose of the meeting; the specific assignments and how they fit into the total program; personal commitment; and dates, time, and place for desired input. Prepare a written summary of assigned duties so all who help know who is responsible for what.

Audience Recruitment and Preparation

___ • Develop a strategy for audience attendance. This should include developing a list of names and addresses of the target audience. The "you all are invited" method seldom works. The methods used to get attendance should be adapted to the specific situation. Variables include: existing level of interest; number of people; geographical location; advance scheduling and notification; methods to be used to recruit and reinforcement needed. Mass media can create awareness but more personal contacts should follow and reinforce.

___ • Prepare the audience for the meeting. This includes: letting them know the purpose so it appears important to them personally; give the time, place and date; provide information on who will attend; let them know of prior preparation needed and what they need to bring; send an outline of the program; and build their level of interest and readiness.

The Speaker (if any)

___ • Select a speaker who is well qualified on the subject. Make sure the speaker is scheduled well ahead of time; is briefed as to the audience, the subject, time limits, and over-all program; is informed if a written copy of the speech is desired and time expected; provides a biographical outline for introduction; and arrangements are made for lodging, expenses and needed equipment.

The Meeting Day

___ • Arrive well ahead of time to make sure all is in readiness. This includes: meeting place unlocked; proper room arrangement; needed equipment available, working and in the right location; room clean, comfortable and properly ventilated; any refreshment or meal plans confirmed; and to be available for last minute requests and emergencies.

___ • Greet the audience and make them feel welcome; provide for registration and readable name tags, if desired. Assign most responsibilities to others so you will be available to take care of unexpected needs.

___ • Someone should meet the speaker(s) and make sure last minute needs are met.

___ • Provide for a learning experience related to the meeting message for early arrivals. This could be publication display, newspaper clippings, posters, specimens, automated slides, etc.

___ • Have adequate stand-up breaks and recesses.

___ • Make sure the program starts, progresses, and ends on time.

___ • The introduction of the speaker should be brief and properly prepare the audience for the speaker.

___ • Make adjustments to make certain the audience can see and hear, participate, and are alert and comfortable.

Evaluation of Meeting Results

___ • An evaluation plan should be developed before the meeting. The evaluation should be done in terms of the meeting objectives. There are seven levels of evidence for evaluation: time and resource input; effectiveness of techniques used; number and description of people involved; reactions of audience during meeting; change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or aspirations; actual practice change following the meeting; and desired end results based on original objectives.

Follow-up

___ • Follow-up should be planned prior to the meeting. Make certain any commitments made for materials, personal visits or subsequent meetings, or other reinforcement are actually done.

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