



Episode 85 Show Notes: How To Run Meetings That Drive Employee Engagement

Employee's workdays are filled with meetings. Are all those meetings really needed? Are the meetings productive? Do they deliver actionable outcomes? Dana Wright Wasson returns to HR Studio Podcast to share advice to HR leaders on running better meetings that increase engagement as the outcome. Whether you are an HR leader running your own meetings or coaching organization leaders on theirs, this podcast will get you to rethink your meetings from the perspective of opportunities to strengthen engagement.

Dana authored the book, *We've Got to START Meeting Like This – Creating inspiring meetings, conferences and events*, and a mini version, *To Meet or NOT to Meet – 10 Tips for Practically Perfect Meetings*. Dana is a global OD consultant who leads clients through transformational processes in strategic planning, employee engagement, and leadership. She is passionate about creating amazing employee experiences, and she believes that engagement is an outcome and an effect of the way people are treated in organizations. Dana is the CEO of Take Action, Inc. and the founder of Work Happy Project. Her most recent book is, *Talk the Walk: Designing a Clear Path to a World-Class Employee Experience*.

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **Can we really have better meetings?** People's calendars are filled with meetings, going from one to the next, which can get in the way of doing good work. Patrick Lencioni's book, *DEATH by Meeting*, talks at length about this. But it doesn't have to be this way. HR leaders can play a significant role in helping line leaders run better meetings. Dana wrote her first book soon after a flight back after attending a bad meeting. It was easy to write the book because it is easy to have good meetings. It just takes a little planning. It is an amazing opportunity to create engagement with people. People come to meetings, conferences, and events because they want to learn something and they want to meet people. A little effort can meet those goals.
- **HR's Role in driving better meetings that lead to stronger engagement.** What can HR do to partner with line leaders who may not be the greatest in running meetings? How can HR bring value, increase engagement, be more productive, and help drive and achieve business objectives?



Any good party starts with a good plan. A smooth party happens because of a lot of hard work, effort, and planning upfront.

- **Start with your objective and the outcome you want to achieve.** Is it a team meeting? A project kick-off meeting? Are you having the meeting to provide an update or are you looking to establish a vision?
- **Who are the right people to invite to the meeting?** This is not a party invitation. Sometimes people attend meetings, and they have no idea why they are there. Who can contribute? An organization chart should not drive the invite. Organizations have to break through the patterns of behavior. There are ways to inform and advise on the outcome of meetings without everyone having to be there. Start with a list, and take the extra time to sort through it:
 - *Do they need to be in the room, at the meeting?*
 - *Do they need to be advised after the meeting?*
 - *Do we need their input prior to the meeting?*
 - *For a meeting, the rule of thumb is 7 people, plus or minus 2. Jeff Bezos from Amazon once said, 'Any meeting where you cannot feed everyone in the room with two pizzas is too big.'*
- **What items need to be on the agenda?** What needs to be covered? How much total time will each agenda item take?
- **Should the meeting be onsite or offsite?** Most meetings take place onsite during the course of the day. Offsite meetings get people away from distractions.
- **To meet or not to meet?** What topics are not worthy of meetings? Is there a decision that you need to make? Is there input you need to get? One organization does not have meetings to only convey information. They only meet to make decisions, give input, and collect data. They convey information in other ways. If you can put information on a PowerPoint slide or Word document and share it, do so. If you are able to eliminate one or two meetings per week, you can free up a significant amount of otherwise nonproductive time.
- **How much time is required to cover a topic?** Teams tend to know what topics need more time. It is important to continually reassess to determine if you are shortchanging the amount of time for certain topics. Are you not allotting enough time? It is important to have a timekeeper to monitor



the time. If longer discussions break out beyond the time allotted, ask the team, ‘what do you want to do? Do you want to continue or put the topic on the next agenda?’ Put the choice on the team so that they learn how to run meetings better. This encourages shared leadership around the table.

- **Have a scribe for each meeting and flipchart the outcomes.** The scribe should take ‘big picture’ notes using flipcharts to ensure that everyone can see the notes and agree to them. Scribes should capture action items and ‘parking lot’ issues.
- **Meeting Facilitation Tips:** Depending on the topic and team, the leader can be the facilitator. However, if the leader wants to participate in the discussion, sometimes a dedicated facilitator is needed. Being a neutral facilitator is a great learning opportunity.
- **Meeting Outcomes.** Be clear about agreed-upon actions. Who does what by when? Chart not just ‘what’, but also ‘by who’ and ‘by when’. Then, there are owners and timelines are agreed-upon.
- **Meeting Information Dissemination.** Should you send out meeting notes? Who do you need to communicate with? Go back to your list. Who was not invited but needs to be informed? Using your Smartphone, take pictures of the flip chart, drop them into a PowerPoint or Word doc using an app like [TurboScan](#), and send it with annotated text/notes. There is no need to retype it. Just get the information out to keep people in the loop, informed, and engaged. It is also important to keep sponsors and other teams in the loop.
- **Meeting Derailers:**
 - **Meeting Time.** Do you need to hold the meeting in the morning when people are fresh? At lunchtime? At the end of the day? After they have finished their work?

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IMAGINE MEETINGS THAT ARE PRODUCTIVE, ENGAGING, AND PEOPLE LOOK FORWARD TO! IT ACTUALLY CAN HAPPEN.

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- **Meeting Duration.** It will depend on the agenda and depth of topics. Check-in meetings should be about 15 minutes. You cannot get anything substantive done in less than an hour. Meetings should not be more than half a day. Otherwise, you may need an offsite meeting.
- **Meeting Protocols.** Are there any general rules to ensure productive meetings? The facilitator develops the rules but holds team members accountable. Examples include, 'one idea at a time', 'no idea is a bad idea', and 'don't shoot the messenger'. The best scenario is when the team starts to self-facilitate. Ongoing teams know where they can run astray. Before a meeting starts, ask if there are one or two rules the team can adopt. Assess the need and develop solutions.
- **Meeting Advice for HR leaders?**
 - Meetings are built-in ways organizations have to engage employees – they happen all the time, all day long. It is an opportunity to engage employees, to listen to them, to get ideas, and to recognize people. When done right, it sets the tone for a much more different workplace.
 - Don't schedule meetings for a full hour. Set meetings for 50 minutes to give people 10 minutes to grab some food or something to drink and to collect their thoughts – the gift of time in an era of back-to-back meetings.

Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [We've Got to START Meeting Like This!: Creating inspiring meetings, conferences, and events](#) by Dana Wright Wasson
- [START Canvas](#) – a planning worksheet designed for a large-scope meeting, one that has many dimensions and is a one-off.
- [MEET Canvas](#) – a planning worksheet for those in-house meetings that happen within a functional team or a project team, to be used to help think through and plan a successful meeting.
- [To Meet or NOT To Meet?: 10 Tips for Practically Perfect Meetings](#) by Dana Wright Wasson
- [Talk the Walk: Designing a Clear Path to a World Class Employee Experience](#) by Dana Wright Wasson



- [DEATH by Meeting: A Leadership Fable . . . about solving the most painful problem in business](#) by Patrick Lencioni
- [Take Action Web Site](#)
- [The Happy Work Project](#)

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