

WHEN it comes to meetings, there are several things to consider

beforehand.

First, have your outcomes set for each section of content. And check: are there outcomes for you, your team, your department, the organisation or anyone else involved?

Ensure that the outcomes and evidence are sensory-based – what you will see, hear and feel when you have this outcome.

It might seem tedious to check each of these senses out and with each person, but just because you see things one way, another person may have a gut feeling about the matter in hand and yet another will want to check that you are singing from the same hymn sheet.

A little time spent on this at this point will save nasty surprises later.

For a team meeting, write the outcomes down and keep them highly visible (on a flip chart, for example) so that amendments or additions can be made on the chart – post-its and different coloured pens are really useful here. Gather other people's outcomes and make sure everyone is happy about which outcomes are the priorities for the meeting.

Check this out by looking at each person in turn. If their eyes move away from you or they appear to be making some kind of face, they are most probably thinking, so give them time before you move on. Only move on when you have a clear yes or no from each person. Again, this

Language skills for successful meetings

Rosie O'Hara, of NLP Highland, based in Forres and Aberdeen, has tips on how to prepare for, and negotiate, during a meeting



saves time in the long run. Set the time frames for the meeting. Ensure that each person involved gets a chance to say what they need to say in their allotted time. Again, give them time to do this – but do not allow any one person to monopolise all of the time. If necessary, interrupt them politely and bring the meeting back on track. Check at regular intervals what is happening for you, for other people and for the meeting process. Check by looking, watching and listening. Watch for red herrings (things that are irrelevant) and ask the following “relevancy challenge”

type of question – “Excuse me, I’m not clear how the issues you are raising are helping us to achieve our outcome”. If any member of the team is repeatedly blocking the process of achieving the meeting’s outcomes by raising “cannots or buts”, an easy way to keep the responsibility with them is by asking questions such as, “What would have to happen for us to be able to...?”. This keeps the responsibility for solving problems with the person who is raising them and enables the person you have questioned to perhaps “think out of the box”. Summarise decisions and

intended action plans for each stage of the meeting. Have each person internally rehearse their next action steps by going through what they are going to do by acting “as if” they are seeing it happening, talking themselves through the steps and actually putting the steps into action. If there are any concerns, go back and check that the outcome is stated in the positive, that it is specific – that the way it might affect other people, other areas of work, has been checked, what evidence there will be that the outcome has been

achieved and what each person has to do. Finally, summarise all the next action steps, with a completion date and a person specified to be responsible for the action. Confirm the date for the next meeting.

NEGOTIATION SKILLS

- Be prepared to walk away – or at least pretend you will.
- Always take time to gather information along the way, to consider and reflect, and allow the other person time to finish what they are saying and to consider and reflect. Hurrying will achieve nothing.

- Invite the other party to put down the first marker, and then wait.
 - Never accept a first offer, especially if it's claimed to be the final offer.
 - Aim high and ask for what you want simply and in an assured manner.
 - Maintain your position by using a restriction; this can be practical, financial or something you believe to be true.
 - Avoid goodwill concessions. These actually make things harder.
 - Make small concessions, one at a time, and always get something in return – give nothing away for free.
 - Trade concessions using “If ... then ...”.
 - Build clear and unambiguous agreements by asking “What if ...”.
 - Make the process enjoyable – if the task is stuck, change the subject (the person with the most flexibility in any interaction will get the best result).
 - Resolve deadlock by finding out what the other party's concerns are and by understanding their concerns.
 - You cannot negotiate a complaint. Ask for what you want.
 - Written numbers appear more real than spoken numbers. This is an illusion.
- For further information, visit www.nlphighland.co.uk