

4 Simple Suggestions for Better Meetings

by Joan Dempsey

I'm the president of a non-profit board of trustees and before I took the helm our meetings were primarily show-and-tell sessions: the director showed and told and we sat passively and listened, contributing ideas when we were asked. That was then.

Fast-forward to now. I remember the moment when, after months spent introducing some SURE-Fire Meetings practices into our group, I realized our board culture had shifted for good – here's what I saw:



- Every single person was up from the table, posting ideas on the wall;
- An enthusiastic and constructive dialogue was taking place as people worked;
- As facilitator I completely disappeared from people's consciousness – this was *their* meeting!

To be honest, I don't use *everything* I learned in SURE-Fire Meetings, one of the courses offered by Global Learning Partners, but I use just enough to make a difference (and aspire to use even more – practice, practice!). Here are a couple of suggestions, based on small things I did that made a difference:

1. **Prepare & Seek Input** – E-mail everyone in advance and ask for their input on the agenda (feedback on the draft and additional items to add).
2. **Plan for Reactions** – Know that people have reactions when information is presented (whether it's invited or not), so plan in advance a specific way to ask them to react – people feel more comfortable when they know their role, so spell it out for them and steer them in the right direction. Ask open questions!
3. **Engage** – During the meeting, break up the usual round-table discussion with small groups or pairs work so everyone's voice can be heard. For example: In pairs, describe the new policy in your own words. Back in the larger group, what are your questions about the new policy?
4. **Be Respectful** – Start and end on time, with periodic check-ins during the meeting; it sounds so simple but think how often it doesn't happen – respect people's time!

What have you done to make your meetings better?