

## Four Questions to Transform Your Meetings!

by Christine Little

It just appeared in your calendar — the mysterious 1.5-hour meeting. You are one of eight invitees. The attached agenda has four topics you've heard something about around the office. You click "accept" and quietly say goodbye to 1.5 hours.

At Global Learning Partners, we teach practical tools for planning and leading effective meetings — the kind you want to click "accept" on. But let's face it, you are not always the one planning and leading the meeting!



So, for all the invitees out there, here are four questions you can ask (nicely!) to transform the quality of your contribution to meetings.

### BEFORE THE MEETING

1. **Why are you bringing me in for this meeting?** People often EXPAND meeting invite lists unnecessarily. Sometimes for that buzzy prize we call "buy in". Sometimes, just to be sure they are not excluding someone. But, the best meetings are the ones where the invitees have an important stake in the topic. What's an important stake? Your input is required. You will need to make the decision, and therefore need to hear the perspectives of the group. You will be required to take action on the outcome of the meeting.

This question is not just to get yourself out of the meeting. It is to clarify what your stake in it is. So, when you are invited and really don't know what your stake is in the topic at hand, pick up the phone and ask the meeting owner! He/she should be able to clarify it for you, and if not, begging off saves your time and everyone else's.

*"Hi Mike, this meeting for Tuesday just showed up on my calendar. I am not really clear about why I am being invited. Can you tell me why you are bringing me in? Is there something specific you will want from me on these topics?"*

2. **Which agenda items will you want my input on?** Sometimes, meeting agendas have a host of topics. Perhaps topics 1 and 2 are relevant for everyone, but the other topics are not. If that is the situation, you can suggest joining for the relevant segments. That might encourage the meeting owner to arrange the agenda to accommodate the relevant "guests," or even breaking it into two shorter meetings for different groups.

*"Hi Susan. There are four topics on the agenda. I don't think I am involved in all of them, but wanted to check with you so I can be prepared. Which of these agenda items will you want my input on?"*

## DURING THE MEETING

- 3. What will we be doing or deciding with this topic?** We recommend that meeting planners map out “achievements,” rather than agenda items. An agenda item is something like this: “New Campaign Poster Design.” An achievement looks like this, “by the end of the session we will have reviewed the new poster design and offered suggestions for the next draft.” If your meeting owner doesn’t specify the achievement, this question can help him/her to define it. He/she likely has one in mind. This helps the whole group to focus on the task at hand, and can avoid a long presentation — or an unfocused discussion — about the poster.

*“Just so I know how to focus my comments here, can you tell me what we will be doing or deciding with this topic?”*

- 4. What decisions or actions have we agreed to on this topic?** It is all too common to end a discussion without confirming what just got decided and who is taking the lead on it. You may feel relief to move onto the next topic, but watch out! If we didn’t get to a finish, this item is going to come back as another meeting to have the same discussion. So, as you move from one agenda item to the next, use this question to confirm where the group has landed.

*“Before we move on, I am not sure what just got decided here. What decisions or actions have we agreed to on this topic? Who is taking the lead on that?”*

### **What tricks do you have to transform the meetings you attend?**

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