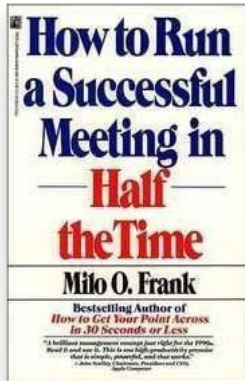


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Milo O. Frank

Milo O. Frank is a nationally acclaimed authority on communication skills and strategies. He has worked as the Director of Talent and Casting for CBS Television, been a writer-producer of feature films, and vice-President over production for Cinerama, as well as a popular lecturer and seminar leader.

How to Run a Successful Meeting in Half the Time

THE NUTSHELL

Meetings are a fact of our everyday lives. When you stop to think about it, how well you present yourself and your ideas and how well you work with other people are the two basic essentials of any career. And that's what meetings are all about. They are an important management tool, and the way you conduct yourself at meetings, whether you are the leader or participant, can make or break your career.

Meetings don't have to be long and unproductive. By mastering a few techniques and strategies you can get the job done—in half the time.

You should only have a meeting when it is the best way to achieve an objective. A meeting without an objective is a trip to nowhere. A trip to nowhere goes on forever! A single, clear-cut objective is a great timesaver for any meeting. You know exactly why you are there and what you expect to accomplish.

There are several things to consider when calling a meeting. The first is who to invite. You need to invite those who can help fulfill the meeting's objective. This does not mean only invite people who will agree with you. A person opposing your objective may do you more harm by being excluded from a meeting than by being present.

How to Run a Successful Meeting in Half the Time

An effective meeting is usually the result of good preparation. A written memo or agenda is the best means of giving and securing information and, if properly put together, will focus you as well as the recipients on the objective of the meeting and the means to achieve it. During the meeting it can also be used as a guide and reference, and after the meeting it can serve as a reminder of what is to be accomplished and a means of checking on follow-up actions. Time spent preparing a written memo, or agenda, will *save* time during any meeting. But, keep it short. *Write no memo longer than one page.*

A good memo will state the objective of the meeting, the issues to be discussed, the time the meeting will begin *and end*, who will be there, and what is expected of them in the way of preparation before the meeting. Careful preparation is the best way to keep any meeting on target and on time. It will cut your meeting time in half.

Meetings can drag on endlessly, and one reason for this is a lack of shared objectives. If people have different goals, paralysis often results: no agreements or decisions are made, no progress accomplished.

There are a couple things you can do to alleviate this problem. First, do your homework. Know before you go into the meeting where people stand—know what they want, why they want it, and what the best reasons for and against it are. This way you can adapt what you say and how you say it to accomplish your own objectives, without alienating the opposition.

The second thing you can do also happens before the meeting. *Get the right people on your side* before you start. Build alliances, share information, get “buy-in” before you walk in—especially from key decision-makers. Sometimes you can even get decisions made ahead of time. Then why have the meeting? Use it as an informational forum, and take advantage of any new suggestions that emerge.

It’s vital in any meeting to be able to say what you want to say in an interesting manner and in as short a period of time as possible. You’ll earn other people’s respect, and you will save time.

Visual aids can help you save time at a meeting. An effective picture really is worth a thousand words. Just remember it is an *aid* to help you communicate. Pictures are often used that have nothing to do with the actual point. Props are some of the absolute best visual aids. They focus attention and make a point within seconds.

There are basic principles of “meeting time management” that it is wise to pay attention to:

1. Q: How can you make a dull meeting less dull? A: Shorten it. (The pace of the meeting will pick up, people will be engaged, and work will get done.)

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2. Q: How can you keep a meeting from running overtime? A: Set a time limit in advance and *stick to it*.

When you are in a meeting, the most important consideration in keeping a meeting on track is to discuss only one question at a time. This is significantly easier if there is a clear agenda. If not, it becomes difficult for the leader to keep people on task, as everyone will pursue his or her own agenda.

What is the difference between stimulating discussions and a productive meeting? In a word—*results*. At the end of every meeting the objective should be restated and the results of the meeting summarized. Also, restate any assignments that have been made and any follow-up actions that are required.

Follow these suggestions and you will have shorter, more productive meetings. You, and everyone at the meetings, will appreciate it.