

## Creative Meeting

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General Manager Chris and the senior staff have been meeting during the week prior to the House Committee meeting and are focusing on adding new and vibrant events to the Club calendar. The intent is to add some energy to the Club: not to necessarily eliminate the old standbys, but to find something exciting. It seems that the staff are not getting traction on anything new. At the House Committee meeting, Chris brings up the same topic, and after an hour of discussion, nothing new arises.

It's very common and often very productive to count on direct reports for guidance and help in solving problems. However, relying too heavily on direct reports also carries some disadvantages, because this group generally tends to favor current operations, and will therefore defend the status quo or be reluctant to really open up about ideas other than the GM's. There may also be reluctance to move out of their comfort zone of "same-old-same-old" and into an experiment that will certainly entail more work! With Member committees, other issues may arise during brainstorming. Sometimes committee members, like staff, enjoy the established routines and are reluctant to try something new. As a recommending committee, they have some skin in the game, and trying something new also means a possibility of failure!

Joseph Pistrui, in his Harvard Business Review (HBR) article, "To Seize the Future, Create a Leadership Circle," suggests that forming a leadership group of 15-18 people with diverse backgrounds may help break through some of the characteristic problems of groupthink. Forming a diverse group to brainstorm ideas may eliminate or reduce the fear of failure, and break down other in-group barriers that prevent out-of-the-box thinking. A GM knows who interested parties might be within the Membership and can put together a group accordingly. Selecting a group that includes a few members with other club affiliations can also aid in generating new ideas.

Because this will be a select group meeting in an ad hoc format, Chris has the opportunity to set the template for the meeting. Bob Frisch and Cary Greene suggest in their HBR article "If You Can't Say What Your Meeting Will Accomplish, You Shouldn't Have It," that there are two fundamental questions which are key to setting goals for meetings:

What do you want to have debated, decided, or discovered at the end of the session that you and the team haven't already debated, decided, or discovered?

What do you want the attendees to say when their team members ask, "What happened at the meeting?"

Answering these two questions then allows for clarity in *defining the work to be accomplished*, the first of four important steps in structuring an efficient meeting, according to Liane Davey in her HBR article "A Step-by-Step Guide to Structuring Better Meetings." Efficient conversation can be promoted by *dividing the agenda into similar categories*. It's difficult to completely control the conversations, but categorizing similar topics makes it easier to stay on-topic. Most Members will want to know the time length of the meeting: *be clear on the intended meeting duration* and stick to it. Finally, to make the meeting valuable, *plan for what happens if all the topics are not covered*.

If time runs out, don't try to force all the other issues; instead, set up another time to discuss whatever important issues have not been sufficiently discussed.

Committees, however good their intentions, may wander off-topic. As a GM, it can be difficult to get the group back on track when the chairperson is also a Board Member. As the originator of the group, Chris can take advantage of being the "chairperson" and will be more easily able to keep the meeting focused. Setting the agenda through the use of the two questions and a solid structure will certainly be a good start. Perhaps by setting this tone, Chris can create the environment where Members trust Chris to conduct an efficient meeting.

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