Meeting Skills for Inclusive Moderators

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Why meeting skills now?

- Part of the upcoming all-hands will be an unconference

- The best unconference sessions are those with people who know how to run good meetings

- This class will help you make the most of the unconference

About me

- Contractor for the all-hands unconference
- Co-founder and former ED of Ada Initiative
- Co-organized 7 unconferences on 3 continents
- Created and taught the Ally Skills Workshop
- Taught Overcoming Impostor Syndrome
- Worked at IBM, Intel, Sun, Red Hat, etc.
- Served on two boards of directors

Class format

- Introduction
- General meeting hygeine
- Roles for good meetings
- Discussion ground rules
- Q & A

Bad meetings

- Some people talk too long
- Some people can't get a word in edgewise
- Decisions don't get made
- Decisions are made but without buy-in
- Lots of off-topic discussion
- Rudeness and humiliation are common
- Takes way too long

Good meetings

- Everyone gets to contribute relevant knowledge
- Decisions get made with appropriate buy-in
- Most discussion is on-topic
- Politeness and respect are normal
- Meeting ends on time or early

How can you have more good meetings?

Sometimes, all it takes is just one person with the skills and motivation to run the meeting well!

Other places you can use good meeting skills

- Unconference sessions

- Talking with friends

- Important discussions with loved ones

- Collaborating on hobbies

Basic meeting hygeine

- Create an agenda and send it out in advance, or otherwise establish clear goals and purpose

- Assign action items to specific people

- Call out action items separately in the meeting notes

- Send out meeting notes within 24 hours

- Have explicit plans for following up on action items

Laptops and phones

- In a well-run meeting, people will be too engaged to use laptops and phones

- But people might not notice the meeting has gotten better

- After introducing good meeting practices, try asking people to close their laptops for just one meeting (except for the scribe)

Meeting roles

- Moderator

- Gatekeeper

- Scribe

- Timekeeper

  http://adainitiative.org/2013/10/02/running-your-unconference-discussions-effectively-adacamp-session-role-cards/

  Credit to Intel's corporate training class on effective meetings

Bad meeting scenarios

- Everyone spends half the meeting talking about important but off-topic subjects

- Ashley and Leigh spend 10 minutes arguing when they actually agree

- No one can agree on any decisions

- Ashley decides on a new timeline without giving Leslie a chance to share supply problems

- Leigh snubs Ashley several times

Moderator

- Keeps the discussion on-topic
- Follows the agenda
- Guides group to make decisions
- Seeks out comment
- Steps in when people are behaving badly
- End meeting on time

Bad meeting scenarios

- Leslie starts speaking and everyone rolls their eyes and settles in for a long boring off-topic rant

- Ashley has important data but every time they start speaking, another person interrupts

- Leigh has good points and is on-topic but dominates the discussion completely

Gatekeeper

- Interrupts people who are speaking too long

- Pays attention to who is not getting a chance to speak and invites them to speak

- May do work outside the meeting as well as during the meeting

Bad meeting scenarios

- Everyone disagrees on what performance targets they set in the meeting

- Ashley keeps taking credit for Leigh's ideas

- No one can remember the sales figures from last week

- Leslie finally got everyone to agree to a difficult decision, but Ashley doesn't remember it the same way

Scribe

- Takes notes of major contributions and decisions

- Interrupts to clarify points when necessary

- Records action items

- Sends notes out

Bad meeting scenarios

- The last three agenda items don't get discussed in the meeting for lack of time - and they are the most important items

- The meeting goes way over time and Leigh is late to pick up their kids

- Discussion on a topic is rushed for lack of time and important information gets left out of the decision

Timekeeper

- Tracks progress towards meeting goals

- Estimates time to discuss topics if not already noted in the agenda

- Interrupts to remind people of the current time and what is left to do in the meeting

Using the roles

- Start explicitly assigning roles at the beginning of your meetings

- Be wary of tendency to assign women the role of scribe more often than men

- One person can take on multiple roles

- If the person with that role is speaking, distracted, or not doing a good job, consider filling in

- Power relationships make this harder!

Using roles in meetings you don't control

- Most people are grateful when someone starts taking on these roles in a meeting

- Start taking on whatever roles are most needed, either implicitly or explicitly

- Making a casual suggestion that someone take notes, etc. often works

- But sometimes this is seen as a power play against the nominal leader of the meeting

Unconference sessions

- Survey results say a good moderator and gatekeeper is the key to a good session

- Use printed role cards to encourage participants to take on the roles

- Role cards do not confer sole ownership of roles

- Any participant can and should take on a role if no one is doing it well

Additional role for all-hands unconference: Reporter

- If desired, turns results of meeting into 90-second lightning talk

- Signs up for and presents talk at the end of the day

- Leads action following the unconference, or refers people to the person doing that

Turn-taking signals

- Signals for "I have something to say"

- For some groups, eye contact is enough

- Explicit signals: raise a hand, raise a finger, make a list of people who want to speak in order

- Optional: two hands for "something relevant now"

Power relationships

- Powerful people not following rules
  - Don't confront if it will harm you
  - Powerful people need increased self-awareness and self-regulation
  - Discuss outside the meeting or get their boss to talk to them

Power relationships

- What about humiliation, domination, insults?
  - Subtle: "Well, actually" and passive-aggression
  - Non-verbal: sneers, inattention, ostentatious ignoring
  - Handle in the meeting or wait till after
  - Often reflective of systemic problems

Q & A

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