

How to get your team to participate in meetings with 5 tactics of buy-in

If you struggle to get people to participate in a meeting, you're not alone. Many people dread meetings and once they're under way, folks clam up or space out. Lack of participation in the meeting is a sure roadblock to productivity. Before you know it, a downward spiral takes hold -- everyone's quiet -- except you. As the meeting drags on, people may feel resentment because you're keeping them from their "real work." When your conference room is silent, how can you keep your meeting actively moving forward? With buy-in.

5 tactics of buy-in that will boost meeting participation

You've booked your conference room and everyone's shown up, but that doesn't guarantee they will take part in the meeting. Next time you feel like you're talking to a wall in your meeting, put some (or all) of these five elements of getting buy-in to work. They'll get people engaged and make your meetings more productive. They might even help you end your meeting early (gasp).

Be smart about how you schedule and prep the meeting to keep meeting participants focused and get their buy-in

Use tools of engagement to spark your attendees' commentary

Use powers of persuasion to make meeting participants feel excited and agreeable

Plan to negotiate so people join in on the back and forth

Drive to the final decision or outcome smoothly so meeting participants are on board

Let's dive in:

1. Be smart about how you prep the meeting to keep meeting participants focused and get their buy-in

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Time of day. Shoot for scheduling during mid-morning or mid-afternoon. Hold your meetings before 9 in the morning and people will be too grumpy or tired to participate. Schedule them right after lunch and they'll fall asleep. Book them after 4 and folks will watch the clock. Our analytics indicate 10am and 1:30pm are the most popular time slots for meetings.

Length of the meeting. Keep it short. A meeting that needs more than an hour will create rumblings among the masses. People's attention spans are so limited that going past an hour guarantees that participation at the meeting will drop. Divide the meeting content into short units of time. The longer you stay with one idea, the more likely you'll lose people. Before they yawn, move on.

Physical State. Hold a walking or standing meeting so people are physically more engaged with their surroundings. Not every meeting will run most effectively in a standard meeting room. Get creative and experiment with different areas around the office.

Attendees. Does every colleague you invited actually need to be there? If there are 2 people from the same team, can you go with 1 as a representative for both? Oftentimes meetings have far too many people. Designate who the core stakeholders are and start with them. Then decide if you need the extra layer of advisors/consultants. Lastly, if anyone is there as more of an FYI -- follow up with them via email or Slack and save them from another meeting.

Set the rules of engagement. Come up with an agenda for your meeting in advance and share that via your email or calendar invite beforehand, or as soon as the meeting begins. If you're looking specifically for how to improve team meetings, let every team member be responsible for a different portion of the meeting and make those roles clear ahead of time.

Mobile devices. Set rules for devices at your meeting from the get-go. When people are distracted by their phones, for example, they're not focused on the task, or meeting, at hand.

Visuals. If you have the equipment, use visuals. Audio alone doesn't always hold people's attention. Consider a slide deck with images, charts, and bullet points to illustrate your ideas. If capturing ideas on a whiteboard fits your meeting, use it. Print

out your agenda or a few visual references so people can stare at that and stay engaged if they start to get restless.

Practice what you're going to preach. Type up what you're going to say before you get in there. Then, try and remove as much verbiage as possible and translate any jargon into human speak. Buzzwords are draining.

2. Use tools of engagement to spark people to participate in a meeting

People conversing with each other in a meeting

Have others contribute to the meeting content. By including others in deciding what will be discussed, they will take ownership of their part. Even after their segment of the meeting is done, the pump will be primed for them to continue to contribute. If this is in relation to how to improve staff meetings, the ownership factor is huge in making it feel like an equal opportunity meeting.

Regularly ask for input and invite questions. Provide opportunities for people to speak up. By asking questions, you direct their attention to a specific idea and focus their thinking. They will take part in the meeting by the natural Q&A of the conversation.

Make your meeting interactive. If you have a large group, pair people up and assign tasks. Follow up the task by allowing each person to share what they found. Everyone will participate in their break out discussions and it's likely several will contribute to the larger conversation. Congratulations! You have folks talking. Once in the groove, they're more likely to stay involved. Throw in some icebreakers or games like trivia. Knowing how to make meetings more interactive will make the meeting fun and lighten the mood. Setting people at ease will make them more comfortable with speaking up.

Give credit where credit is due. Reward those who contribute to the conversation. Others will take note and feel inspired to share their own ideas.

3. Use your powers of persuasion to make meeting participants feel excited and agreeable

Person with loudspeaker in a meeting

Get people in the room to say “yes” . Have them agree to something (even unrelated) right off the bat. They’ll feel comfortable saying yes to your ideas and will be more likely to say yes to your final proposal.

Be friendly. Actively listen and sympathize with people's ideas and desires. Let them know that they're supported rather than in competition with your agenda.

Let others “own” the idea. Sure, you initially introduced the idea, but if you let others discuss it and then validate what they say, before long, they’ll start to think the idea is theirs. Should discussion get side-tracked, ask questions along the way to lead them toward the final concept you want them to “own.”

Avoid arguing and show respect. If you get confrontational, people will become defensive. They may quickly take a position opposite yours simply because they feel offended. Even polite disagreement gets in the way of winning someone over.

Share context and data. Often times to get people to agree to something, all you need to do is explain the background information. If there’s a big context clue left out, people may divert to an entirely differing opinion. If there is concrete data to back up a belief, that can help people feel confident in the decision you’re guiding them toward.

4. Plan to negotiate so people join in on the back and forth

Use negotiation to get people to participate in meetings

Take on the least important issues first. Get people to participate in the meeting negotiations by priming them with minor topics early on. Once you move to bigger items, they will be in their negotiating groove. Encouraging active participation keeps the meeting moving forward and productive

Keep your information handy. Be ready to field questions in your meeting. While you might be able to answer most of them off the top of your head, you may need to depend on resources, too. If you’re able to answer questions quickly and fully, you’ll be better able to move the meeting forward.

Shoot for the moon. Go after your “pie in the sky” final outcome with the idea that it will be negotiated down to a more reasonable but still acceptable result.

Be ready to compromise. In negotiations, a hardliner who won't budge can stop progress in its tracks. Before you begin the discussion, let people know that compromise will be part of the process. Negotiation is the art of give and take. Show people you're ready to give a little and they'll do the same.

5. Drive to the final decision or outcome smoothly so meeting participants are on board

Getting productive decision making in a meeting

Take a vote. If you think that the room isn't split go for a majority vote. A vote will invite everyone to participate in the meeting equally.

Offer only a few choices. If there aren't many ideas to choose between, decisions happen faster. You'll also create less cognitive load (the space in our brains we can dedicate to a particular choice) by having fewer options.

Meet on Friday afternoon. While it may go against our earlier recommendation, this tactic can help make decisions happen. Fast. Hold your meeting late on a Friday, then make clear that the meeting will continue until a decision is reached. Magic meeting motivation will take hold. Your participation levels will increase as people eagerly move the discussion along.

Source: <https://robinpowered.com/blog/how-to-get-your-team-to-participate-in-meetings-with-5-tactics-of-buy-in/>