



Putting ZING! Into Your Meetings

On an average day, 17 million meetings are held in North America. It's a fact of life – and of Farm Bureau – that the higher you rise in an organization, the more meetings you'll have the opportunity to participate in.

Unfortunately, attending meetings ranks high on many people's lists of least favorite things. A Meeting Planners International Study identified the three top reasons people dislike meetings:

- They get off the subject.
- There's no agenda or goal for the meeting.
- They last too long.

These problems can be addressed by having a written agenda (preferably distributed to participants beforehand) and by the chairman of the meeting working to keep attention focused on the subject at hand. And by announcing and observing starting and ending times.

Still, even with these additions, a meeting may fall short of being dynamic. Edward E. Scannell, director of conferences and institutes for Arizona State University, suggests adding "ZING" to your meetings by trying some of these ideas:

- Set the climate for the meeting, by greeting everyone, describing the meeting's purposes, announcing arrangements, times for breaks, locations of restrooms and telephones.
- Get participation from the people at the meeting – have them raise their hands in response to questions; move around, get acquainted with their neighbor, find another person who shares a characteristic such as wearing glasses.
- Use a buzz group, what Scannell calls the "Phillips 66 Technique": get six people together to discuss a common topic for six minutes. Have a goal for the discussion and a deadline to report the group's ideas. (Or get four people together for four minutes, two people for two minutes, etc.)
- Play the devil's advocate. In advance of proposing a new idea, plan or program at a meeting, arrange for one of the participants to attempt to "shoot it down." The resulting discussion should find weaknesses in the new proposal and ways

to improve it. Whatever the final decision, meeting participants should be more committed to it because of this thorough analysis.

- Get instant feedback on a new idea, either by asking each participant to comment in turn, or by asking everyone for brief, written, anonymous comments.
- Instead of the standard refreshment break, schedule an exercise break of tension-reducing or flexibility exercises, or a few laps around the building. Or jazz up the standard refreshment break by having seasonal fresh fruit, fruit juices, popcorn, or an unexpected food item, such as a particular California food product or a premium ice cream bar.
- Direct special efforts to welcoming first-timers, since "veteran" attendees can get cliquish. Make one new participant the mystery person; the first person to identify the mystery man or woman gets a prize.
- Get creativity going by playing a brainteaser game (such as how many squares do you see on the page or w connect all the dots with four lines without lifting your pencil). Or an acronym game, such as developing a meaningful phrase from letters such as AFBF (A Frankly Better Farmgroup).
- Build the meeting around a Hot Button: a current relevant issue that concerns all meeting participants. Or as a conversation starter, have participants tell, "I have information about issue X, I need information about issue Y."
- Organize a 'Krazy Kollege' or College Bowl on the meeting's topic. Or play the new American Farm Bureau Policy Development Game. ("Who'll bid 11500 for the Four of Cows?")

We can't make Farm Bureau effective without holding meetings. But there's no law that meetings have to be dull. Try some of Scannell's ideas and see if your meeting isn't both more productive and more exciting. And if it is, expect that there'll be more enthusiasm for your next meeting.