How to Have an Inclusive Meeting

MEETING GROUND RULES:
State simple rules such as,

"One person may speak at a time."

"Practice attentive listening."

"Show respect for different opinions."

Unconscious bias can often crop up during meetings. Meetings can create an atmosphere that excludes introverts, women, remote workers, or others not part of the "in-group." These employees may need more time to process information in order to participate in a way that feels comfortable to them. Below are some simple strategies for running a more inclusive meeting and creating space for diverse perspectives that can lead to truly innovative ideas and solutions.

1. BEFORE THE MEETING: **Share the purpose of the meeting and provide any materials or data necessary by email. List the specific discussion questions that you will cover.[1]**

   Remove the "first speaker advantage" that can lead to groupthink by having all participants come to the meeting prepared with a paragraph of their ideas. This strategy especially helps introverts, foreign language speakers, or those who may need more time to absorb the information if they have challenges with reading comprehension.[2]

2. AT THE START OF THE MEETING: **Begin with introductions both in the room and remotely. This simple strategy ensures every person has already made a small contribution simply by stating their name, and that makes their next contribution a little easier.[3]**

   To include remote workers, use video conference if you have it. Be sure to have a chat or instant message group open for all participants to utilize.

3. DURING THE MEETING: **Be sure to listen to all voices. Set up a protocol so that everyone has the chance to contribute.**

   Consider cultural communication differences as well as English language proficiency. Allow foreign language speakers enough time to prepare their input and ask if those who have not contributed have any ideas to share. Remind everyone of ground rules when necessary.[4]

   Best Practice: Go around the table in order and ask for input from each participant individually.[5]

   Best Practice: Amplify voices that are less likely to be listened to in the meeting: make it a habit to repeat their point, giving credit to the idea originator and forcing the in-group to acknowledge the contribution and its original source.[6]

4. AFTER THE MEETING: **Circulate a summary of what was discussed and ask for any further ideas that may have come up after the meeting. This can encourage alternative viewpoints and dissenting views which can lead to a stronger final decision.[7]**

1. Renee Cullinan, "Run Meetings That Are Fair to Introverts, Women, and Remote Workers," *Harvard Business Review Blog*, April 29, 2016.
2. Deloitte, *Inclusive Leadership: Will a Hug Do?* (March 2012): p. 7.
3. Deloitte, *Inclusive Leadership: Will a Hug Do?* (March 2012): p. 7.
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5. Renee Cullinan, "Run Meetings That Are Fair to Introverts, Women, and Remote Workers," *Harvard Business Review Blog*, April 29, 2016.
6. "The Clever Strategy Obama's Women Staffers Came up With To Make Sure They Were Being Heard," *Women in the World Media*, September 14, 2016.
7. Renee Cullinan, "Run Meetings That Are Fair to Introverts, Women, and Remote Workers," *Harvard Business Review Blog*, April 29, 2016.

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