

# Meetings

Everyone complains there are too many — and complains, equally loudly, if not invited to an important one. They are chances to communicate, to plan, chances that sometimes lapse into theatrics. Meeting behavior can be odd that way. What are the best ways to use this shared time?

## Tim McGuire

For several years, I didn't do staff meetings. I'd do maybe two a year because they were hard. People will ask you tough questions. They will come at you. When things got difficult last fall, economically difficult, I decided that I needed to make sure that people knew what was going on. I began monthly staff meetings and now I wouldn't go back. They have been wonderful. They have allowed me, as we've had to tighten some things up, to be straight about that, to make sure the rumor mill isn't the best communicator.

They have allowed me to talk about some values, talk about some beliefs, about what newspapers ought to be about. They have been great. The tougher the question, the more candid you are, the easier the questions get. It's a cycle. Having staff meetings twice a year was creating the tough questions and the adversarial environment. Having them frequently, you don't have that environment at all. I've really learned a tremendous lesson.

## Neal Shapiro

At "Dateline," I had staff meetings once a week with everybody. I was always trying to take one or two things and talk about (them) — and I did not have a 52-week repertoire. So I would go back over some things, which was important, I thought, because you wanted to remind people.

In addition to that, we would break into smaller groups once every couple of months. Those were open forums where people could say, "What do you like? What do you not like?" And I would get feedback that way.

People are not going to come to my office and say, "This piece is horrible, why did you do it? I do not like the direction you are going in."

But in small groups people might say that.

## Sandy Rowe

At 10 o'clock every morning, the paper would be up on the cork board, and we'd be discussing not just what we were going to do the next day, but what things in that paper worked and why they worked, and what things didn't work. Reporters would sometimes wander in and out, and that was fine. And I asked editors to please share comments with their team members.

One of the things that I try to do in leadership is to make things concrete, to take the abstract and make it concrete. ...

We also called stand-up meetings. ... They took about 10 minutes, and the reporters and their editors would gather and talk about what was in that day's paper, and what they thought worked and didn't work, what they were going to work on the next day.

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So we started a lot of conversation. We affirmed the ability to be able to say out loud that we weren't as good as we should be, and to list the specifics of that, and to acknowledge (our need) to make it better.

## Matt Storin

We had to go through a painful process of buyouts as a result of a declining economy. There was going to be a reduction in staff and that was very threatening to people.

Morale was terrible. Now, in that case, I would feel that a full staff meeting was called for. And I would spend a lot of time preparing for a meeting like that.

My tendency was to write a script and try to not memorize it, but remember certain phrases and certain points. And then go down there and stand, not even behind a lectern, but in front of a table ... and just talk to people straight out and take questions.

## Arthur Sulzberger Jr.

How many times have you been in the business meeting where everybody ended up walking out thinking something different had happened? You don't spend those last few minutes saying, what have we agreed, or whose responsibility is it when we are going to get back whatever is [assigned]?

And what are the next steps? We all rush to judgment. We're busy people. Our lives are too complex, too full. We don't spend those last minutes (wisely). The great business leaders [do].