

A handy guide to: Good meeting etiquette

A meeting is as successful as the positive contributions of its members. There are various ways you can contribute in a meeting, sometimes in a formal way (as chair, vice chair or scribe) and many informal ways through speaking, summarising, guiding a small discussion, or asking questions to clarify what you have heard. Here are seven practical steps to a meeting that will make a difference, and a box of 'handy hints' to bring them all together.

- Meetings are for the benefit of all and no one person has the right to dominate or be disruptive. People should be addressed courteously and should feel comfortable enough to make their contributions.
- Whilst the Chair is finally responsible for managing the meeting, it is everyone's responsibility to make the Chair's job as smooth as possible for the good of all. The Chair will aim to ensure that meeting times and agenda items are managed well so that everything can run to time. They also need to manage contributions, keep contributors from repeating themselves, and ensure a few individuals do not monopolise the time. This will ensure that equality and courtesy are maintained.
- Anyone who attends meetings, (whether public or private) should be aware of other people's rights to be treated with courtesy. Nobody should feel bullied or insulted or be verbally attacked by another member. Should one member disagree with another, then there is a friendly and courteous way to disagree.
- Those wishing to speak should signal their intention to the chair and wait to be invited to speak. Before speaking, you should construct the points to be made and stick to them, speaking for as short a time as possible without repetition whilst using clear, acceptable non-defamatory language. If you fail to make all your points, it may not be possible to have another chance to speak if a lot of people are waiting, so it is advisable to make a quick note of bullet points to be made. The chair may need to take a firm line with people who speak without waiting for an invitation; but the Chair will also need to be aware of any difficulty, for example sight or hearing impairment, that may affect a person's perception.
- The Chair has a duty to outlaw disruptive practices, first by **warning** offenders and then, should behaviour persist, by asking the meeting if they are happy for the Chair to ask the offender to leave. This would always be a last resort.

- In group discussion, each participant should make space for all others who so wish, to have a chance to contribute. Someone giving feedback on behalf of a group, should first check with others that the summary is an accurate reflection of what was said.
- Be open to innovation, and prepared to learn from other groups.

Handy hints

Here's a checklist of activities you could go through at the start of your meeting. They give you a clear summary of what everyone should expect to be able to do, and how they can expect to be treated. Agree these at the start to ensure a good event which you will all enjoy.

Ask yourself 'Have I...'

- Read the minutes
- Checked the agenda
- Made notes on what I want to say
- Got written responses to anything I've been asked to reply to
- Arranged to be there for the whole meeting

Tell yourself 'I will.....'

- Really listen to what people say
- Leave me own problems at the door
- Compliment the work of at least one member
- Make my criticisms constructively
- Make at least one well prepared contribution
- Enjoy myself

Based on the ACW/CWTCO Skills Manual 2001