



## 8 Ways To Keep Your Meeting From Turning Into A Snoozefest

Karen Hough, [ImprovEdge](#) | Mar. 1, 2011, 1:28 PM | 392 |

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Bad meetings drive me nuts. I once had to watch two senior partners of a law firm run a “meeting” with their new associates. They all sat around a board table with lunch, while the partners tried to get a conversation going. The associates shrank behind the table and their sandwiches while the partners filled the air with their own voices. The one time a brave soul spoke up, the partner told him he was wrong. Why didn't they just call it a lecture? It sure as heck wasn't a meeting!

When meetings work well, they are meant to build teamwork, generate ideas and gain consensus. Unfortunately, they're not always as positive and [productive](#) as we would like. How can we turn them around?

It's time to turn attendees into participants – whose time and [ideas](#) are valued. Wouldn't it be incredible if meetings actually became fun to attend?!



Image: KINO ARCADES via Flickr

- 1. Hold your meetings anywhere but a conference room or a place that serves food.** People can shut down and concentrate on their food rather than the work at hand. Choose different departments for your meeting, where you and your team don't normally work. What's it like to hold a meeting in the mail room? Go outside if the group is small, and make sure everyone is comfortable and can hear.
- 2. Remove tables and other barriers from the room.** Set chairs in a circle. It will feel uncomfortable at first to people who are used to “hiding” behind a table. Yet it's far more conducive to teamwork and engagement.
- 3. Arrange for other people to present a part of the meeting.** Give them responsibilities or assignments, ample time to prepare, and be very positive about their contributions.
- 4. Turn off all phones, laptops, pagers, etc.** [Focus](#) is the key to short, productive meetings! It's always better to ask a group of people to be fully focused and present for 40 minutes, than deal with constant interruptions and distractions for 90.
- 5. If energy wanes, have everyone switch seats.** Do it at least once per meeting. Then people will have to sit by different peers, see the room and the issues for a different point of view, and get their blood moving.
- 6. At the beginning of the meeting, have each person share something from work that's gone really well recently.** It can be as simple as clearing up an issue with filing documents to as big as getting a major proposal out ahead of deadline.
- 7. At the end of the meeting, have everyone commit to an action.** They must accomplish their action by a set date, and report back on their progress at the next meeting.
- 8. Power down PowerPoint.** It numbs the brain and puts the focus on a screen rather than on the people in the room. Also, the more formally something appears – a beautifully made graph on a chart – the less likely people are to mess with it. You want interaction! Put your ideas on huge sheets of paper and give everyone a different colored marker. As the meeting progresses, each person is responsible for editing and adding to the working document.

Try one or two of these suggestions to get started, then continue to add new elements. Meetings that matter involve people who contribute, are focused on the topics at hand, and are constantly in search of positive outcomes. Good luck, and have fun!

*Karen Hough is the Founder and CEO of ImprovEdge and the Author of “The Improvisation Edge: Secrets to Building Trust and Radical Collaboration at Work” published by Berrett-Koehler, [www.ImprovEdge.com/book](http://www.ImprovEdge.com/book). She speaks internationally and writes on negotiation, leadership, sales, and presenting with impact, and is the recipient of the Athena Award for outstanding woman-owned business*

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**Karen Hough** is the Founder & CEO of ImprovEdge, and has been using improvisation as an engaging learning tool for business for over 12 years.

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