

Episode #34: How to Improve the Effectiveness of Your Staff Meetings

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

Hello. Today I will share three more tips to improve the effectiveness of your staff meetings.

I'm your host, coach Percy Cannon.

In our last episode I shared three suggestions that will help you increase the effectiveness of your meetings:

1. Avoid a meeting stew. Instead, hold single-ingredient meetings, especially between tactical and strategic topics.
2. Ensure there is clarity across all team members on what is tactical and what is strategic.
3. Generate healthy conflict.

Good meetings deliver good decisions. Bad meetings result in bad decisions. Follow these suggestions and your team meetings will move from boring and confusing to attention-grabbing and focused.

Today I will take a deeper dive into item #2 from this list: how you can achieve intellectual clarity in your team, and how this can translate into effective staff meetings.

If you lead a team or are part of one, you likely participate in at least one regularly scheduled meeting, usually labeled "Staff Meetings" or something similar. These staff meetings tend to include topics that are both tactical and strategic, as well as administrative. In effect, they become the meeting stew covered in our last podcast.

I propose that you repurpose regular staff meetings. They should be renamed "Tactical Meetings" and cover only tactical topics. This will ensure that the more urgent tactical topics are addressed appropriately, without competing against the strategic ones. It's ok to identify strategic topics during the tactical meetings, but I suggest that you schedule their discussion for a separate and single-focused meeting. More on this in a moment.

I have three recommendations to make your staff meetings, which we will now call tactical meetings, more effective:

1. **The team should be clear and aligned on what their number one collective priority is for the next three to six months.** Most of the teams I once belonged to, and those I have coached over the last 10 years, tend to have clear individual objectives for each of its members. This is fine, as long as they also have a collective priority that is viewed as more important than their individual goals. Unfortunately, this is usually not the case, as there continues to be a strong behavior from team members to protect their respective silos. Without a collective priority, teams will continue to function as a group of executives reporting to the same boss, giving up the benefit of synergizing between them.

One of the answers to this common dysfunction is for the leader and team members to be convinced of the value of having an overriding priority endorsed by the full team. This collective priority, which Patrick Lencioni calls the “Thematic Goal” in his book *The Advantage*, should be the answer to the question “What’s most important, right now?” It should be just one item, versus two, three, or more. This will probably be the biggest challenge to teams used to having a large number of priorities, all equally important....

This Thematic Goal should also be qualitative, temporary (lasting less than a year), and certainly shared across the entire team.

An example of a Thematic Goal could be “To successfully transition from remote work to in-person.”

2. **The team should also be clear and aligned on how they will accomplish their Thematic Goal.** Lencioni calls these “Defining Objectives.” They zero in on the actions that will allow the team to accomplish their Thematic Goal. They tend to be small in number, between four and six.

Building on the goal of “transitioning from remote to in-person,” here are a few examples of Defining Objectives:

- Identify which internal functions are critical for in-person work.
- Pinpoint real estate considerations.
- Support IT infrastructure and secure confidential data.
- Maintain a close connection with employees through the transition.
- Establish communication plans.

3. **Lastly, here are a set of tips on how to structure and run your tactical meetings:**

- The first tip will probably sound counter-intuitive, but I suggest you avoid developing an agenda before the meeting. As you will see in a moment, the agenda will be established in the first 10 minutes of the meeting.
- Use a green-yellow-red rating system to achieve team consensus on the status of each defining objective. Everybody has a voice in the rating process, and the result should be one color for each defining objective.
- Use the same color rating system to reflect the status of the standard performance KPIs that your team uses. These are typically revenue, market share, profitability, customer satisfaction, quality, etc. Again, everyone pitches in and a color is assigned to each KPI.
- By now you may have a handful of items that were assessed red. Discussing this small number of items becomes your agenda for the remaining part of the meeting.

- Last, but absolutely not least, save the last ten minutes to record the agreements reached and what and how will be communicated to the rest of the organization.

Continuing with our example, let's say your team is three months into the process of transitioning from remote to in-person, and the real estate decisions and communication plans were assessed red. In addition, the market share of the leading product, an important KPI, is red, because it is on a 2-year low level. Discussing these three topics becomes your agenda.

Let's also say that the market share of the leading product has not improved despite several promotional and pricing interventions. Figuring out what to do may be a strategic challenge which requires a longer discussion. But a couple of team members may jump in and start a discussion on how to address this issue.

The leader should protect the integrity of this tactical meeting by stopping the discussion and requesting to set a different strategic meeting to address this topic ASAP. Agendas should be cleared to allow sufficient time to discuss this important topic in a separate meeting.

Summarizing, I invite you to repurpose your Staff Meetings and rename them Tactical Meetings.

To increase the effectiveness of these tactical meetings, I recommend that you and your team work on three key areas:

1. Achieve clarity and alignment on your Thematic Goal—what's most important for your team right now.
2. Pinpoint how this goal will be accomplished within a year or less, which we are calling the Defining Objectives.
3. Use these Thematic Goal and Defining Objectives, together with your regular performance KPIs, as the basis for what to discuss during your Tactical Meetings. Focus on those rated red and schedule separate meetings for strategic topics that will invariably come up during the sessions.

Remember, good meetings deliver good decisions. Bad meetings result in bad decisions. Pay special attention to focusing on the small number of indicators that are rated red and to protecting your tactical discussions from being deprioritized in favor of strategic matters. These strategic discussions should be addressed promptly in separate meetings.

Count on my help as needed.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. In the next one, I will provide tips to make 2021 your best year yet.

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This is coach Percy Cannon, working to help you *make the rest of your life...the best of your life*®.

Percy's BIO

Percy has been helping hundreds of corporate executives and their teams boost their leadership and teamwork capabilities over the past ten years.

Before this, Percy spent close to three decades working for three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, in the United States and across several countries in Latin America.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC", a Certified Go-Giver Speaker & Coach, and a practitioner of several methodologies from best-seller author Patrick Lencioni (e.g., "The Ideal Team Player", "The 6 Types of Working Genius", "Organizational Health" and others).

He published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*).

Percy is a Consulting Partner with Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida.

He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently.

Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

He can be reached at percy@cannon.consulting.