

Smile and show appreciation!

A smile is welcome at any meeting that you will have with your teammates. If you meet to discuss positive aspects or to work on something, it helps people relax, enjoy the work you are doing together and feel good about cooperating with you. If you meet to discuss negative aspects about the performance of one of your team members, it will give confidence to the other that you are still on the same side and you are meeting together to find a solution. Otherwise, these kinds of meetings are often interpreted as confrontational and they end up focusing on who is right and who is wrong, rather than to a constructive solution.

Whatever is the purpose of the meeting don't forget to show appreciation for the individual's work. If you enjoy the work one person did, one idea that he presented, the way he handled some situation, don't forget to mention this. Everyone is searching for appreciation. If you are unsatisfied with some aspects about it, you can still bring into discussion the positive ones. For example, if one staff member that is otherwise very competent is not respecting the deadlines that he was supposed to, you can start the discussion by "Your work here has been appreciated until now and it could even better if you would pay more attention to deadlines" or "You show great motivation in your work and it is a great pity for mistakes like missing deadlines to cast a shadow on it". It again shows that your goal is not to create a conflict with him but to help him achieve better results, which are in both of your interest.

Make sure that you have a participatory approach in solving the issues you are dealing!

Involve all interested parties in finding a solution! Asking a person to get involved in finding a solution for a problem in which the person is part of will help more than telling that person what you personally and in a non-transparent way decided that he/she should do.

It is not just what you say that counts. How you say it is equally important!

Communicate in a way that captivates and motivates, show that you believe in what you are saying and in the positive impact of what you are proposing. Treat the others with respect and try to engage them in finding a solution instead of directly ordering them what to do. People that feel they are being approached with respect will be more reasonable to the requests. Moreover, when decisions are taken with the participation of all parties involved, people are more motivated to put them into action. Also, explain on each occasion why the things are the way they are or what are the objective factors that make you decide one way or another. The goal of your meetings is not to criticize but to find solutions together.

Some phrases you could use in order to put all these in practice are:

- "This is why I am turning to you to try to find a reasonable solution so that it will be in both your interest and the interest of the project"
- "Do you think that we could find a solution to this?"
- "Let's think though. Isn't there any other way to solve this, as at this point we are in a loose-loose situation"
- "I was wondering if you could help me solve this challenge that we are facing"
- "Do you find this a reasonable request for you?"
- "Does this makes sense for you?"
- "Let's not see this as a problem for a while"
- "It is important both for the project and also for you, personally"
- "We all have to work together to make some adjustments in order for everyone to be comfortable and the project to achieve its objectives"

Whatever you say, always be polite, no matter the discussion! Politeness will help avoid unnecessary conflict.

Show that you care!

If the other feels that you show in interest on his matter he will be more open for also caring about your interest and it will be easier for all of you to find the common grounds. Showing that you care is not just a “single day” process (“today I care, tomorrow I don’t”), it is a way of thinking and of acting that should guide you throughout the project and the facilitation process. Avoid phrases like “I don’t care” or “it is not my job” but instead give advice in any of the matters that you are being addressed, even if this is just politely explaining that a more suitable person to handle this would be our colleague, “X”. Also, promising that you will solve with something and not doing it doesn’t help and has the negative effect of making the other loose his confidence in you thus blocking future reasoning together.

A matter of "perception"

"A negative perception is seen as true until proven otherwise. It appears either because something is not happening properly or something appears not to be happening properly, but in any of the cases something must be done to change it."

Starting from this you can more easily approach volunteers or staff on delicate topics. You are not judging that something is happening but rather pointing that there is a general/personal "feeling" or "impression" that something is not right. By using "feeling" or "impression" you do not show a judgmental approach but rather you are bringing into discussion a matter of "perception" regarding one situation that should be handled, either because there is a real problem which needs to be fixed in a way or because a wrong perception of the real situation exists and this should also be corrected. Also, by approaching this from the matter of perception and offering to provide support in changing this perception, you have more chances of getting to the actual source of the problem, as the volunteer will not act in a defensive way, trying to excuse himself. This happens because in this way you are not positioning in two opposite sides but rather you are offering your support and you are showing you are ready to understand what is really the issue.

Make sure that any decision that you take together is stated into an action plan!

A simple “Yes, I will change this!” will not do it. After deciding on the basics, work together on developing an action plan in which both the other person and you take responsibility on what you are doing and until when this needs to be done! This is also helpful in tracking the changes and approaching the situation again if, for one reason or another, things are not improving. Write the plan on paper in order to have a clear reminder of what it needs to be done and also make sure that the other reads it, acknowledges it and even make a copy of it, in order to have these guidelines with him at all time. There is no need for having signatures on the plan or anything of that matter, especially if it is the first time that the situation is addressed, but make sure to have the plan with you and to refer to it if you see that the necessary steps are not taken (e.g. “Last time we discussed about this, we made this plan. Do you remember about this paper?”).