

To get the most out of a meeting, don't mind the gap

Caroline Franczia, founder of UpperCut-First, looks to Fight Club's Tyler Durden to teach readers how to finesse their meetings.

80% of the outcome of a meeting depends on how well you prepare for it. This is especially true if there's an obvious power dynamic between meeting attendees – for example, in the boardroom.

There are three typical outcomes: frustrated attendees, excited attendees, or, worst of all, unmoved attendees. The last thing you want is for people to leave feeling blank –as if nothing had happened, and no value was ever exchanged.

To maximise your chance of creating value with your meetings, get everything out in the open from the start. Participants will be more likely to leave feeling renewed if you are all clear on objections and struggles. Don't put on a show.

No great brainstorming session ever arose from a perfect situation, so let's put up a gentle fight. To illustrate my point, I'll be enlisting the help of the famous Tyler Durden, and Fight Club's Narrator.

As Tyler Durden says:

'It's only after we've lost everything that we're free

to do anything.'

Let's look at the common mistakes made while preparing for a meeting. There are three typical states of mind that we can highlight during this phase:

(Hardly) preparing at the last minute and hoping for the best

Confusing urgent and important leads them to believe the phase of preparation is a waste of time. This situation will often occur due to past experience: the previous meetings held in a disorganised way, jumping from one subject to another, with little structure or guidance thus providing little value and no call to action. Without an agreement on follow-ups, there was no tracking of progress until the next meeting, which most probably repeated precisely in the same manner.

This circus can go on and on, until one of the parties grows so frustrated that there's a stand-off – or, alternatively, both parties silently accept that no positive results will ever come out of the arrangement. Meetings become more and more scarce, using poor excuses for rescheduling, postponing, and canceling.

Narrator: 'Most people... normal people... do just about anything to avoid a fight.'

To postpone conflict, you put up a presentation with a few graphics, promising customer deals you, deep down, know are fictitious. Your objective is to get out of the meeting as soon as possible, head high – with a few pumped-up figures and a fluffy plan.

Tyler Durden: 'Sticking feathers up your butt does not make you a chicken.'

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Preparing thoroughly with details

Spending so much time gathering information that they get lost in details. Time is of the essence here, and gathering information from all the departments can be essential. But only if you know what to ask, how to structure it, and how to use it. Too much information can ruin a meeting and its outcome.

Tyler Durden: 'Man, I see in Fight Club the strongest and smartest men who've ever lived. I see all this potential, and I see it squandered.'

It's a double punishment: the person has put a lot of effort into the preparation but, because of a lack of focus on the essence, misses the opportunity to get valuable feedback, strategic suggestions, and actionable insights. This leaves a bittersweet taste in the mouths of everyone attending. No clear ask has been made of the leadership in the room.. Thus, additional work - actions that have nothing to do with the situation - is dished out. The feeling of misunderstanding is mutual.

'If you don't know what you want,' the doorman said, 'you end up with a lot you don't.'

— Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club.

Assessing the issues, presenting a plan, providing clear asks.

Now, this approach seems simple enough – and is clearly the most logical way to address a meeting. Nevertheless, it is the hardest to find. Many people feel a need to justify they've done enough – to prove to others and themselves they are doing their job properly.

This meeting style requires a person who feels confident enough to be vulnerable, lay out the missing piece of the puzzle, and ask others for help. They're willing to put their ego to one side, and accept being challenged without feeling bruised.

Tyler Durden: 'Today is the sort of day where the sun only comes up to humiliate you.'

It takes an extraordinary amount of courage, a great mindset, and a coachable mind to come up with the issues- the gap to accomplishing your plan – first. This is the most effective way of moving forward and extracting value from the brilliant minds surrounding you in a meeting.

Since the issues are primarily laid out, it avoids a lengthy conversation to uncover them, thus leaving space to the people around the table to come up with additional problem solving ideas and a clear path of actions to achieve a solution. Providing an accomplished plan to be reviewed will grant you a successful meeting and a good reputation.

Tyler Durden: 'How's that working out for you?'

Narrator: 'What?'

Tyler Durden: 'Being clever.'

Narrator: 'Great.'

Ricky: 'Keep it up then.'

Don't forget to provide attendees with a list of actions to accomplish after the meeting ends. .

Laying it all out in front of your leaders, advisors, board members is a perfect opportunity to brainstorm, find new creative solutions, or simply create an environment where tough decisions can be made. If you don't do this - you'll find yourself alone in the decision process. In a properly conducted board meeting, you might collectively decide it is time to kill a demanding product with little impact, or let go of a team or an executive that is no longer a fit for your organisation.

As a salesperson, one of the hardest things to do is to admit a gap and come up with a solution, rather than holding on to a fake pipeline. Your manager may ask you to qualify out some deals, do so, you'll save yourself from hours of working in the wrong direction.

It takes guts to act this way. Sometimes you'll be challenged on it. But it's also one of the most rewarding things to do.

Chuck Palahniuk: 'I don't want to die without any scars.'

When you put yourself in the defender's position (justifying your plan of action), you naturally put the other people in the attacker's place. If you want a sparring partner, don't consider your hierarchy, your board, or your customer as superior. You owe them respect, but this is won by bringing value, structure, and expertise to the fight.

Whether you're present to your board, your leadership, your manager, or your customer, when the notion of revenue is involved, addressing the gap with all your might is the most efficient and effective route. Those who have applied all of these principles form part of a particular club. But shhhh, we can't talk about it.

