



# Meetings and Healthy Conflict

*"You don't have to hate meetings. They are better than a root canal!"*

*Matt Regitz*

## Introduction

A quick Google search will show how controversial and challenging meetings can be. One leader shares his experience: "I've participated in a meeting where our parish leadership team developed a new staff structure which clarified responsibilities, empowered employees, and enabled us to cast vision and mission throughout the parish. I have also been in a two-hour meeting where sixteen people debated the right place and time for our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to use hand sanitizer... and this was years before the Covid-19 pandemic!" The question, it seems, is not whether we should have meetings, but instead, how we should have meetings.

We want to avoid meetings that lack focus, purpose, and follow through. Often, we gather for meetings without identifying the type of meeting we are about to have. Without clarifying why we are meeting, we often disengage people with the default to "going around the table" and having everyone make a report. No attention is given to time, no priorities are set, and ultimately nothing gets done. It no surprise that meetings are often resented.

Despite this, we believe that meetings have the potential to be engaging, impactful, and even fun! When we take the time to form healthy practices around how we meet and why we meet, we open ourselves up to the power of the Holy Spirit enabling the fruit of our renewal to blossom.



## Successful Meetings

- People Focused
  - Meetings are not about one person, but a team of gifted and grace filled individuals.
  - Engage participants before the meeting, asking what they hope to accomplish.
  - Begin every gathering in prayer.
  - At the start of a meeting, check in with one another, taking time to support your brothers and sisters in Christ.
    - Don't be afraid to have lighthearted tones. Ice Breakers can be effective tools to engage people and bring people's guard down.
  - Be aware of how people process and make decisions.
    - External Processors - think out loud and come to decisions and conclusions by talking about things.
    - Internal Processors need to take in the info, think about it quietly, internally, then can share ideas and decisions.
- Clarity Around Purpose
  - Prior to meeting, communicate why you are meeting and what you hope to accomplish. This allows participants to come prepared and know what to expect.
  - Make sure you have the right kind of meeting that suits the purpose.
    - Ask, are we gathering to clarify our vision, form a strategy, set tactics, or something else?
    - Examples of meetings are 1:1s, All Staff Meetings, Leadership Team Meetings, Strategic Team Meetings, Ministry Leader Meetings.
  - Make sure that you have the right people present.
    - Only gather those who need to be there.
    - Make sure those who gather know why they are there and how they can contribute meaningfully.
    - Pay attention to the gifts of those gathered, and work to prevent blind spots.
      - Tools such as APEST and CliftonStrengths create self/team awareness.



- Take and distribute clear meeting notes.
  - You do not need to record every word in a meeting. Instead:
  - Capture key concepts - what has been accomplished, pain points, and action items.
  - Include what was decided.
  - Clarify and assign action steps that need to be taken by the next meeting.
- Respect People's Time
  - Make sure your meetings end on time.
  - Keep your meetings focused on the purpose for which you gathered.
  - Establish the right cadence.
    - Be intentional about the length and frequency of your meetings.
    - Establish appropriate structures for your various meetings to follow.

## Healthy Conflict

*Pope Saint John XXIII once said that whenever he would prepare for a meeting with someone which he felt could involve unpleasant conflict, he would ask his Guardian Angel to take it up with the other's own angel, and once the angels conversed the meeting would go much better.*

- Normalize Ideological not Interpersonal Conflict
  - Create a safe space to disagree about ideas, without attacking people personally.
    - If the situation becomes too tense, step away, pray, and give yourself time to recover.
  - Ask what do I want for myself, for this person, and for the team.
  - Talk about the facts, free from personal judgement.
  - The Pastor should model that it is okay to disagree with one another, including himself, and that disagreements can be made respectfully and with the aim of bettering the team and not attacking an individual.



- Realign and Remain United
  - Give all team members the opportunity to share input and become comfortable with what has been decided.
  - Normalizing healthy conflict enables every voice and idea to be heard.
  
- Clarify the Decision
  - Dialogue is not decision making. Clarify the decision and ensure everyone is aware of what has been decided.
  - While we may disagree with what is decided, we should leave each meeting united in the decision.
  - Act on the decisions that were made.
  
- Celebrate Wins and Team Unity
  - When you leave the room, you should be able to celebrate the wins you have in overcoming the conflict. Go out into the community aligned, passionate, convicted, and having built strong community together. This spirit can spread to the pews and have lasting impact.