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Case Studies in Collection and Technical Services -
- Case Study Six: Run with the Meeting

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Finally, Meghan was going to be in charge of a meeting. She had been waiting for this opportunity for months, and Lila, her boss, was going out of town and had assigned Meghan the duty of running the weekly technical services department meeting. Meghan was excited, but also nervous. There was a lot riding on her doing a good job; performance evaluations were not that far off in the future, and as well, she knew that if she handled this meeting correctly, the possibility that she would be assigned to be the chair of a committee would be much higher. So now, she needs to know how to make sure it all goes well.

Meghan is concerned because she knows that there are some curmudgeons in the department who might give her a hard time and could possibly obstruct her efforts at doing a good job. She has not been at the library as long as some of these possibly difficult people, and as well, a few of them are much older than she is. She realizes that she will have to be especially careful to include and appreciate the input from these colleagues. However, she is uncertain how to ensure their positive input.

As I See It!
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day responsibilities in the context of the organisation as a whole, and emphasise the interdependence of all departments, then individual departments will never understand the wider context in which they work.

• Create communication. Get different groups and functions together. Get their input on what works well, and what creates problems. A problem shared is a problem on the way to being solved.

• Convene and chair regular meetings to promote shared goals and ownership of agreed solutions. It is always better to confront issues with an open debate than to let issues fester. No successful leader is ever the expert on everything, so involve the team, and get them to take ownership of decisions. They will appreciate the opportunity.

• Use customer feedback. Customers, whether they are library patrons or publishers' customers, are very sensitive to the impact of tribals problems within the organisation. Their point of view represents an important measure of the efficiency of the organisation.

Understanding our tribal nature, and evolving strategies and processes to shape and direct the energy that it releases, is the key to a smooth and efficient organisation.

The Experts Speak:

Running meetings well takes planning, initiative, facilitation skills, time management skills, people skills, and follow-through. There are tons of resources Meghan can use to help make this meeting a success, there are many books, especially business or management books, as well as multiple Websites devoted to the topic of meetings. While she will surely avail herself of these resources, below we impart a quick list of practical planning tips to get her through the process, but we suggest that a more in-depth study on the topic will serve her well in the long run. And finally, during the process we will provide a few ideas on how to gain the willing involvement of the possible stick-in-the-mud colleagues.

First, Meghan needs to find out from Lila exactly what she would like to be covered at the meeting, and what possible outcomes, if any, need to come from the meeting. At this point, in a face-to-face, phone, or email encounter, Meghan can also ask if Lila has any special advice in how to make sure the meeting goes well. Lila will appreciate Meghan’s quick follow-through, and will enjoy being asked for advice. Many bosses like having the opportunity to share their expertise, and by asking, Meghan will have initiated an opportunity to learn something that will most likely be quite useful.

Once Meghan has picked Lila’s brain, she will need to make sure that the space for the meeting is reserved, and that it has the necessary set-up for the meeting.

Next, she will need to send an email to the rest of the department asking for agenda topics, announcements, etc. In this email she will want to remind everyone about the time and place of the meeting, and perhaps give them a head’s up about the items that are already on the agenda. As well, she will need to give them a deadline for getting back to her. This may not alleviate late responders, but it will give her the opportunity to say no to people who respond too late, especially if the agenda would be too long with the addition of the late submissions. If people do respond too late, Meghan can just give them a heads up that they will not be able to present, and ask them to present their item last on the agenda, so that the entire meeting can focus on running the meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting she will want to make sure she starts on time, no matter if everyone is there or not, as this will show respect to those who showed up on time. She will want to welcome everyone, and ask for their help in making this a productive meeting as this is her first time running one. This will get the participants on her side, and perhaps give them incentive to make it go well. And she will want, at this point, to pass out agendas, documents and handouts if people need them. At this point, if there is not already a designated minute taker, Meghan needs to ask for a volunteer or designate a minute taker, so that she can focus on running the meeting.
During the meeting Meghan will need to call on her facilitation skills to keep the group moving through the agenda, while also allowing for everyone to have reasonable input and response time. If there seems to be heated discussion over any particular subject Meghan can suggest that a deeper discussion needs to happen when there is more time, and that she will include in the minutes that this needs to happen, and then, firmly move on to the next topic. Keeping your wristwatch on the table in front of you, or sitting directly across from a clock can be a good way to keep an eye on the time. Good meeting facilitation skills will help those uncertain of Meghan as a leader gain respect for her abilities. If she keeps the meeting productive and on-going, they will more than likely not heckle her or impede the meeting’s progress.

Meghan will want to end the meeting on-time, or better yet, a bit early if at all possible. Last steps are to review any action items, making it clear who is responsible for follow-up, and then by thanking everyone for their input and help in making the meeting go so smoothly.

After the meeting, Meghan will want to get with the minute-taker, and agree upon a deadline for when the minutes will be complete, preferably before Lila’s return. If needs be, Meghan may want to offer to take the person to lunch, or do them a favor, in return for timely turn-around on the minutes. As well, Meghan will want to write a follow-up email just to Lila, letting her know how the meeting went, alerting her to any areas for concern, and reporting on any action items that Lila will need to know about on her return.

Whew! Now, finally, Meghan needs to congratulate herself on a job well done. If she follows our advice, she will most likely be hitting the closest ice cream parlor and having a banana split to celebrate her successful first meeting!