

Making the Most of Your Meeting Time!

You've heard many times that one of the best ways to make your meetings more effective is to schedule activities well in advance. However, it may seem like an almost impossible task. Weather, speaker conflicts, time constraints, location limitations, and even scheduling the time to schedule seem like road blocks. Sometimes, it seems much easier to just wing it on the meeting night, doesn't it?

People who schedule meetings faithfully say that meetings run much smoother, accomplish more, and are more enjoyable for all. Why? Because all members know what's coming and can adequately prepare. When commanders arrive at the meeting they don't feel they have to be everywhere at once giving people things to do. They can concentrate on getting the mission accomplished.

There are many ways to schedule meetings. Some squadrons choose to use a quarterly schedule having a basic framework of activity subjects. When scheduling, all that is needed are the specific activities to fill the subject blocks.

Other squadrons assign one member to fully plan out each meeting. That senior member is responsible for selecting the topics, finding any speakers needed, and handling the details.

Whatever scheduling program is used, there are several things to keep in mind:

- **Make the schedule far enough in advance and for a long enough duration to give you breathing space.** Having a two or three week schedule simply isn't practical. It leaves you behind the power curve in planning. Speakers, for instance, typically need several weeks' notice to accept an invitation. It may take longer to gather necessary materials for hands-on projects, activities, etc. Scheduling aircraft and crews in particular is cumbersome when the activity is planned on short-notice.
- **Be sure to have several contingency plans available.** Nothing is guaranteed. It pays in the long run to have back-up plans available in case of an unforeseen event. For instance, have a video or film available in case a guest speaker doesn't show up or the weather turns ugly. If a meeting is canceled and it's practical, consider sliding the schedule forward to maintain the continuity of scheduled training.
- **Schedule the senior portion of the meeting with as much detail as the cadet portion.** This is a component that many squadrons have a little trouble. Cadet portions of the meeting may be very well thought out and planned. But the senior portion may tend to be more free form, and sometimes left to chance. This cheats seniors out of a positive and structured experience. Consider dedicating certain times of the senior meeting for specific events. For example: the first hour could be dedicated to training and testing (training in the specialty track, mentoring new seniors through the Level I process and assimilation into the unit, ES, communications, and testing). When practical, consider combining events with cadets. Examples include ES practical training and first aid. Other parts of the meeting could be dedicated to guest speakers, and squadron administration.

- **Don't construct your schedule during a meeting.** It's just too busy. A better time to plan is another evening during the week or during a weekend. This way you can take your time and flesh out what you want to accomplish without constant interruption. Some squadrons plan their meetings at a restaurant over dinner, or do it at a member's house of a Saturday afternoon at a cookout, adding an element of fun to the process
- **Get your staff involved.** Scheduling is so much easier when it is a group effort. You and your staff can brainstorm and combine resources. You can delegate responsibility for implementing the schedule among the staff and reduce the workload for everyone. Consider having cadets join you in the planning process. They have a lot of good ideas. Getting your staff involved also creates buy-in. They will be happy to participate in implementing the schedule because they had a say in creating it.

Once you've decided to construct a schedule and chosen the time and place for the scheduling meeting, where do you start? Consider what your unit concentrates on and build a schedule around your unit's particular specialty. If you are from a cadet or composite unit, you may also want to consider using the framework outlined in CAPR 52-16. Also remember the weekly requirement for an aerospace current events discussion and the monthly requirement for a safety briefing.

A dedicated meeting schedule is one of the simplest, yet most effective ways to control your meeting and make it enjoyable. A little foresight, imagination, and planning is all you need to make your meeting more productive and fun.