12 The Meeting Game- Getting Your Voice in the Room

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12. The Meeting Game

Successful introverted leaders strategize for people interactions. It helps to look at meetings as a game, not in the “back-door office politics” way, but like a game of

When you play a competitive sport, you first have to learn the game. You may start by watching a few matches, taking lessons, and getting a grasp of the rules, including how to keep score. As you gain mastery, you also learn how to size up your opponents and develop a strategy. You may think, “If they are weak in their backhand, I will hit my shots there” or “I need to run into the net if I notice them hanging out in the back court.” This is what makes you a strong player. There are also meeting basics that can help you be successful in navigating meetings as an introvert.

Key Learning Point: Prepare For Meetings

What is the desired outcome for the meeting? Is it to tell the group about a decision or to sell one? Is it to make the decision? Is the purpose to solve a problem, create ideas, vent feelings, or recognize achievements? Unless there is a clear target for what you want to accomplish, then it is guaranteed to be an inefficient and ineffective meeting.

What is the reason you have been asked to attend? Were you copied on the invite list out of habit? If your boss delegated you to be there in her absence, are you empowered to make decisions? If not, then your presence can actually slow down the meeting process because decisions will be held up until your boss weighs in.

Consider using something similar to the job aid below as you prepare for meetings.

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<th>Meeting Preparation Job Aid</th>
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<td><strong>What is the reason I have been asked to attend?</strong></td>
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Successful introverted leaders strategize for people interactions. It helps to look at meetings as a game, not as in "back-door office politics" way. When you play a competitive sport like tennis, you first have to learn the game. You may start by watching a few matches, taking lessons, and getting a grasp of the rules, including how to keep score. As you gain mastery, you also learn how to size up your opponents and develop a strategy. You may think, "If they are weak in their backhand, I will hit my shots there" or "I need to run into the net if I notice them hanging out in the back court." This is what makes you a strong player (in addition to natural ability).

It is similar with planning for meetings. You need to prepare before the meeting:

Key Learning Point: Know the Purpose

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Key Learning Point: Have an Agenda

Going to a meeting without an agenda is like going sailing on a ship without sonar, there is no frame of reference and no way to measure progress. You can “manage up” by asking the team leader to provide an agenda so that you can be better prepared to fully contribute to the meeting. You can also offer to prepare the agenda and run it by your manager or team leader. This is a great way of stepping up, and will help you be more confident about the remarks you want to make during the meeting.

An introvert who knew his style, shared: “A former boss of mine, an extrovert, and I developed a rather nice system . . . . . . Before a critical meeting, he would come by my office and drop off a written proposal. He would then leave and say, ‘I need you to look at this. I will be back in five or ten minutes.’ This one action helped us both tremendously. He gave me time to study the issue internally, and by coming back he could toss his thoughts in the air and be in his zone as well.”
Key Learning Point: Plan Where to Sit and Stand

In live meetings be smart about where you sit. Kimberly Douglas, CEO of Firefly Facilitation recommends that you sit a few seats away from the leader and resist your tendency to hide in the back of the room.

What about on conference calls? Make sure you stand. Even though people can’t see you, they will hear more energy in your voice. Standing up makes your voice more robust as your diaphragm opens and you breathe in more oxygen. Also be sure to get on the call a little early. Plan on engaging in some initial chitchat with the leader and other members. This rapport building will help substantially when you get to the real give and take of the meeting. Your presence will already be established. It becomes even more important to use your voice and words to establish strong communication on conference calls when you don’t have visual cues.

Key Learning Point: Ground Rules – A good meeting practice

Ground rules are guidelines the team agrees to follow. They help to put some controls on the meeting process. Here are a few tips regarding ground rules:

1. Consider your ethnic and organizational culture. In Asian countries, for instance, it would not work to have a rule about “speaking in headlines.” The norm is to encourage consensus and group discussion.
2. Discuss the rules and get buy-in from the group. Make sure the wording fits and that the meaning is clear to everyone.

Sample Ground Rules:

- Be on time—start and stop time of the meeting, back from breaks and agenda items
- Participate—engage and be present
- Show respect—no side conversations and one person at a time
- Devices on silent—that includes vibrations
- No laptops—takes away focus from the meetings
- Speak in headlines—focus on main points
- Confidentiality—what is said stays in the room
- Silence—gives us time to shuffle our thoughts
Key Learning Point: How to Be Heard At Meetings

Here are some tips shared by successful introverted leaders:

• Be prepared with your facts and be ready to jump into the conversation.
• Don’t smile or nod your head in agreement. That only encourages the long-winded participant.
• Hold up your hand with the stop signal, especially if a talker is going on and on. Then say, In a strong voice say, “I am speaking and would like to finish my thought.”
• Make your comments with confidence. “Look them in the eye,” Trina Thompson, an introverted director of help desk operations said, “They can smell it when you are not prepared.”
• If you miss your opportunity in the meeting, don’t hesitate to talk to the person afterward. Trina learned that “a sidebar is better than nothing. They then know you have something to contribute, and they are more likely to bring you out the next time and consult with you outside the meeting.”

Key Learning Point: A Visualization Can Help

Sheri, a training manager holds onto an image from nature to comfort her when she feels overwhelmed by extroverted team members in meetings.

As a proud introvert Sheri relates to the great blue heron. This bird stalks their prey slowly and deliberately. They are solitary or small-group foragers. While the geese (the talkers) are loudly squawking, or doing what geese do, she thinks about the blue heron and it gives her a sense of peace.
Key Learning Point: Become The Meeting Expert at Your Organization

You can become a meeting subject matter expert. Because the majority of organizations seem to lack the fundamentals of basic meeting management, why not bring in different ways of approaching meetings? You can be the one to create agendas, establish ground rules, and champion other involvement techniques. These can be small changes that make a huge difference in moving your meetings forward.

Take the example below of Janine on how she became the meeting expert...

IT director who has had a track record of promotions. Janine had just joined a group of peers who ran pretty dysfunctional meetings. At times, even shouting matches occurred. She was not one to yell back though she could certainly hold her own. Janine was frustrated because she knew meetings didn’t have to be energy drainers. She felt compelled to take action.

As a first step, Janine met with the team leaders privately and suggested he post some ground rules. He agreed and after buy-in from the group. Janine told me that the ground rule, “One person speaks at a time” figured prominently on the list. People started listening to each other. Slowly meetings started getting back on track.

Though they still disagreed on many issues, the ground rules helped the team to work through their disagreements.

You too can step up to make meetings a productive tool by suggesting effective practices that increase productivity for you and your organization.
Quiz (check your answers on the last page)

1. The most important benefit of having a meeting agenda for introverts:
   a. It helps the meeting stay on time.
   b. It allows for preparation time prior to the meeting.
   c. It keeps the leader focused on the key desired outcomes of the meeting.
   d. It allows for more productive discussions of issues.
2. Introverts often receive feedback that they don’t speak up enough in meetings.
   One way to create a more visible presence is to:
   a. Follow the “First Five Minute Rule.”
   b. Arrive at the meeting on time.
   c. Volunteer to take notes.
   d. Raise your hand when you have a point to make.
3. As an introverted leader what can you do to become a more effective meeting “Subject Matter Expert”?
   a. Volunteer to lead meetings.
   b. Analyze effective meetings that you attend for best practices.
   c. Keep up with the latest meeting technology tools.
   d. Suggest your team do a quick evaluation after each meeting.

Applying what you have learned

Here is a sample that you may consider.

I will create a set of ground rules to propose to my project team leader. I will also volunteer to present them to the team and ask for input.

Now, write your own action.

I will ________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

The benefit to me and my organization include __________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________
Quiz answer key

Question 1 Answer Key
a. Having an agreed upon agenda can help all participants focus their comments. The leader can refer to the agenda to wind up discussions and move towards action items.
b. The correct answer. For an introvert, having the time to prepare is the most essential benefit of having an agenda. Knowing the topics beforehand allows them to carefully review necessary materials, craft their questions and consider their point of view.
c. An agenda tends to help the leader stay on target, especially if they distribute it beforehand and refer to it during the meeting. They can also use the agenda as a tool to give their introverted participants a heads up about how they want them to contribute during the discussion.
d. The preparation work done by each member does allow for more of an in depth exploration of topics at the actual meeting. Meeting leaders do need to remember to ask quieter members for their opinion or the introvert's valuable input can ignored.

Question 2 Answer Key
a. The correct answer. To get your "voice in the room," remember the first 5 minute rule. The longer you wait it is harder to find a space to interject your comments. If you speak early on, even if it is a brief comment your are sending the message that you are an active participant.
b. Arrive at the meeting early. It will allow you to converse with others and establish rapport. You can also put your excellent observational powers to use by reading the dynamics of the group. This will make you better prepared to contribute as the meeting progresses.
c. While this is fine to do from time to time, being a scribe doesn't allow you to fully participate in the discussion and speak up. Your role is to listen to others and take notes and you want to make sure people here from you as a fully contributing meeting member.
d. In school, we are taught that it is polite to raise your hand. However this doesn't translate to most organizational meetings. With an active group of talkers you won't be noticed. Look for an opening and make your point. Try using a gesture like a raised hand when interrupted.

Question 3 Answer Key (all are correct answers)
(a. The correct answer. There is nothing like practice. Get your feet wet with less risky meetings outside of work. Consider volunteer roles in community organizations. where you can become more comfortable with this skill. You can also offer to volunteer leading a segment of a meeting for your boss.
b. The correct answer. Note what tactics and tools work at meetings and the training you attend. For instance, using sticky notes to brainstorm is an introvert-friendly technique that you could adopt in your own department meetings.
c. The correct answer. There are a plethora of online tools to schedule and conduct meetings. Try interjecting these into your organization and achieve kudos from others for increasing efficiency.
d. The correct answer. An excellent way to continually improve meetings is to ask for a plus and delta when the business is concluded. Suggest that members either say or write down one positive aspect of the meeting and one area to improve. As this feedback is incorporated into your meetings you will see efficiency increase.