



## Business Meetings

Jack looked at his computer screen. Using a spreadsheet, he had broken down his department's financial statements so that the employees in each of his work cells could see the amount of profit their team was making for the organization. He was not sure what to do next. He picked up the phone and called Marty.

"Hi, Jack," she answered. "How are things going down there?"

"Great," he replied. "I'm just not sure what to do next."

"All right," Marty replied. "I have a few more ideas for you yet. Come on up when you get a minute, and I'll show you." Jack could not wait. He grabbed a legal pad and a pen and went straight to her office.

"Business Meetings," she said when he arrived.

"Huh?" Jack stuttered.

"Once you form work cells, you will need to help each cell learn to increase their profit or their score on their performance matrix if they can't use profit as the goal," she explained. "A great way to do this is by starting Business Meetings for each work team."

"How often should we have these meetings?" asked Jack.

"In the beginning, I suggest having them once a week for an hour," she said. "Start the first meeting by reviewing the income statement or the matrix for the team to remind them of their goal. Then ask them for any ideas they have to increase the profitability or matrix score for their team. I suggest using round-robin brainstorming to get the greatest quantity of ideas. Here is how it works:

1. Give each person in the room a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to write down as many ideas as they can for improving the profitability of their cell. Allow five minutes for this.
2. Now ask each person, in order around the table, to share one improvement idea with the group. If they do not have an idea to share, tell them to say, *pass*. As they share their ideas, write them on a flip chart. Keep going around the table collecting and recording ideas until everyone says, *pass*.
3. Ask the participants if they see any duplicate ideas on the master list. Combine these. Then number each idea on the list.
4. Ask each person to write down the numbers of the two ideas that they would most like to implement. Go around the room and ask for each person's choices, making a mark next to each chosen idea on the flip chart. Add up all the marks and underline the top choices."

"I bet you could generate a lot of good ideas using round-robin brainstorming," said Jack.

"It works great," confirmed Marty. "Now that you've got it narrowed down to a few good ideas, ask for a volunteer to take responsibility for working on each of the top choices. When they volunteer, take out a sticky note and document their commitment in the form of an 'Action Item.' Remember to include *What*, *When*, and *Who*. The *What* should be a description of what they are committing to complete by the next Business Meeting. For example, they don't have to get that new materials handling idea entirely implemented by the next meeting, but they might talk to an engineer about it. The *When*, or due date, should always be the date of the next Business Meeting. *Who*, of course, would be the name of the responsible individual."

"Decide on a place for each cell to post all their current Action Items," Marty continued. "That way, those responsible will not forget their action items, and everyone can see what is happening. Be sure to remind everyone that being the owner of an action item does not mean you have to do it yourself. Encourage the owners to ask for help from teammates and staff people."

"We have a small conference room near my office that I could dedicate just for my teams to use," said Jack.

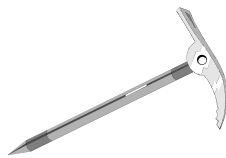
"Sounds like a good idea," said Marty. "After the first Business Meeting the agenda should go as follows:

1. Review the Action Items from the previous meeting to make sure they got done.
2. Review the latest performance measures for the cell. If they have not been updated since the last meeting, you can skip this.
3. Brainstorm new improvement projects to improve the performance measures.
4. Document a new Action Item (which are often small parts of larger improvement projects) for each member of the group."

Jack nodded. These ideas made sense to him. If he showed his people their financial statements or matrices every week, eventually they would understand them and figure out what to do to increase their profit or improve their matrix scores. As they thought of ideas, he would teach them to document them as Action Items so that improvements would happen every week.

Jack knew from talking to customers that if his department decreased their lead time to less than one week, they could get as much as 30 percent more orders. To get them started, perhaps he would suggest that a few of his people talk to those customers. That's the idea, he said to himself. Don't give them the answer - teach them how to find it themselves.

He jumped out of his chair and walked out the door to reserve a conference room for the first Business Meeting.



### **CLIMBING TIPS**

1. Tell the team members that you expect each of them to take at least one Action Item at each Business Meeting. They don't need to be big efforts; they can be small tasks. If every team member takes on one small task each meeting, eventually they will add up to huge improvements.
2. Keep the completed Action Items. You can either post them in another display area or place them in each employee's personnel folder.
3. As a manager at Kodak, I coached five work cells. One cell set an aggressive profit goal. They volunteered to meet every day for an hour during their lunch

break (Kodak bought the food). They used the agenda I described above for their meetings and constantly generated new Action Items. We had a silly rule to encourage people to finish their Action Items on time: If anyone did not meet their commitment for that meeting, they would have to return all of our lunch trays to the cafeteria which was three flights up. If everyone met their commitments I returned the lunch trays. I made many trips to the cafeteria, but I didn't mind. This team taped a piece of flip-chart paper to the wall in their meeting room and kept all their Action Items there. They divided the flip chart into six sections, one for each major part of the experimental film making process, to keep the Action Items more organized. The result of all this work? The team reached their goal and had a great time doing it.