



How to Lead a Mindful Meeting

What makes a meeting a mindful meeting?

Let's face it, many people don't love going to a lot of meetings, especially if they are poorly executed. You've probably had your share of meetings that felt like a total waste of time. A mindful meeting can help solve this issue.

A mindful meeting is one that infuses mindfulness practices and emotional intelligence into an effective meeting structure. What makes a meeting mindful is mostly in how participants show up and interact with one another, though there are structural components as well.

The intention of a mindful meeting is to create the conditions that allow for focused attention, thoughtful responses, deeper connection between participants, and to foster emotionally intelligent participation.

It is important to note that not every meeting needs to be a mindful meeting and not every mindful meeting needs to follow all of the suggested steps. We invite you to use this meeting structure in its entirety or to pick out pieces that you can use in a meeting structure that works for you.

Mindful Meetings: Step-by-Step

Before the meeting

Mindful Meetings ideally start before the meeting begins by creating the conditions that allow for a Mindful Meeting.

1. Distribute an agenda for the meeting

Mindful meetings start with a shared understanding about the purpose of the meeting. Distributing the agenda and objectives ahead of time (when appropriate) allows everyone to show up prepared.

2. Self-check

Do a mindful check-in with yourself prior to entering the meeting space. Try using a 3-breaths practice or 1-minute meditation in order to check-in with your mental and emotional state.

Level-up! When you enter the meeting, silently offer wishes of wellness to the others around you. As you look at each person, say to yourself, "I wish for ____ to be happy." This simple practice can shift how you show up and can have an impact on others and the tone of the meeting.

During the meeting

3. Minute to arrive

As the meeting begins, invite everyone to take a minute to arrive. You may invite people to be silent for 1 minute or lead a short focused attention meditation. Choose a practice that is suitable for your group and be willing to try different approaches over time.

4. Group norms

For groups that meet regularly, establish a set of norms to which everyone can agree and hold themselves accountable. It helps to occasionally review norms in subsequent meetings and norms may evolve over time. If the group does not meet regularly or if this is a one-off meeting, use this time to set some intentions for this meeting.

Suggested norms:

- a. **Curiosity and open-mindedness** - be open-minded to others' ideas and ask questions for clarification and understanding.
- b. **Acceptance** - acknowledge and accept that others have a worthwhile point of view, even if different from our own (acceptance is not about agreement).
- c. **Avoid multitasking** - remove distractions and keep focused on the meeting. If feeling unfocused, participants ask for a quick break to help refocus.
- d. **Monitor headspace and emotions** - pay attention to thoughts and feelings before responding to ensure responses are intentional and not purely reactions.

5. Quick check-in

Take a few moments to allow each person to check in. Depending on group size, check-ins can be from 30 seconds to 2 minutes. The intention is create an opportunity for more connection between members. It can help for the leader of the mindful meeting to go first in order to model openness and vulnerability. The following are some potential check-in prompts:

- a. How are you feeling right now?
- b. On a scale of 1-10 how much of your focus and attention is in this meeting right now?
- c. Is there anything that is getting in the way of you being fully present? If so, is there something that can be done quickly to resolve that?

Alternative: An established group may choose to try paired check-ins. With paired check-ins, participants form groups of 2 or 3 people. The facilitator suggests a check-in prompt (e.g. What enables you to be your best self at work?, What work is exciting you these days/frustrating you?, etc.). Each person has 3 minutes to check in, followed by 3 minutes of open conversation.

[Structure: Person A - 3 minutes / Person B - 3 minutes / Open conversation - 3 minutes.]

6. Review agenda and intentions for meeting

Review the agenda and desired outcomes (e.g. decisions, action items, or questions answered). Check to ensure all necessary items are included in the agenda before proceeding.

7. Manage the agenda

As you move through the agenda, articulate when you move from topic to topic and recap any relevant decisions or action items along the way. If a useful diversion comes up, communicate that this tangent is happening and what impact it will have on the rest of the agenda. If the diversion is not useful or appropriate at that time, add it to a 'parking lot' for future discussion or delegate that discussion to the appropriate people.

Brain breaks

For meetings that last more than an hour, schedule short breaks that allow an opportunity to reflect or clear their minds. This can help sustain people's attention, focus, and energy.

Managing conflict or intensity

Conflict and intensity aren't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, when managed well, conflict can be quite valuable. If not managed well, it can derail the effectiveness of a meeting. In a mindful meeting, the facilitator will monitor the group and will make suggestions based on conditions in the meeting.

If emotions or tensions do start running high, encourage people to take a moment to pause and check-in with their emotions and intentions before continuing. If tensions are VERY high and it seems unproductive or potentially harmful to continue, end the meeting and reconvene after time for settling down and reflection, if possible.

8. Closing

Take a few minutes at the end of the meeting to recap all decisions, agreements, action items, and/or open questions. Review the questions: What have we decided today? Who's going to do what, by when? How will we resolve the issues that are still open? What's likely to get in the way of us implementing what we agreed to today?

9. Check-out

If time permits, allow each person to share how they are feeling at the end of the meeting. Use the "one breath rule" which means any comment should be short enough to fit into one breath.

After the meeting

10. Follow-Through

When appropriate, make sure meeting notes or a recap of decisions and action items are sent to stakeholders.

Mindful Meeting Agenda

Before the Meeting

- Distribute an agenda Share agenda with attendees before the meeting (when appropriate)
- Self-check Do a mindful check-in with yourself before the meeting

During the Meeting

- Minute to Arrive To begin the meeting, invite everyone to do a 'Minute to Arrive' practice
- Review group norms Establish and review group norms (when appropriate)
- Check-in Each person takes 30 sec-2 min to check-in
- Review agenda Facilitator reviews the agenda and intentions for the meeting
- Manage agenda Facilitator manages agenda and tracks decisions and action items
- Closing Before closing, recap decisions, action items, agreements, and open questions
- Check-out Each person 'checks-out' with how they are feeling leaving the meeting

After the Meeting

- Follow-through Commit to sending meeting notes or a recap of decisions and action items, when appropriate