



## Five Questions for Better Meetings

*A simple model designed to improve all kinds of user experiences can make your meetings more engaging and more productive.*

Unless you work alone, meetings are an essential part of your day-to-day operations as well as an expression of your organization's culture. When meetings go south, not only are they a waste of time and money, they can send messages that ultimately undercut performance, impede collaboration, and lower morale. Bad meetings aren't just annoying - they're a problem that needs to be addressed.



[Doblin](#) is an innovation consultancy that developed the "Five-E Model" for improving all sorts of user experiences, from walking into a store to navigating a website. The five E's that Doblin asks designers of those experiences to consider are: *entice*, *enter*, *engage*, *exit*, and *extend*.

As someone who regularly leads [workshops](#) on improving meetings, I can see how this model can be translated into a useful series of questions to consider while planning your next gathering:

1. How do we **entice** people to attend (or, if they must attend, how do we create excitement around the event)?

Most meeting organizers address the first E by promoting high-profile speakers, particularly compelling topics, or the location

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And they don't include "Can I skip it?"

### Not Talking Points, Connecting Points

Learn the difference starting May 12th.



## About Us

*free-range thinking* is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

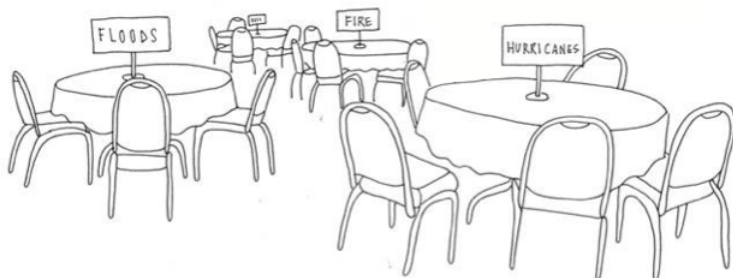
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(assuming it's desirable). But even routine internal meetings can be made more appealing if a carefully prepared agenda is circulated in advance and feedback is solicited to ensure that everyone's time will be well spent. (See the January 2000 [issue](#) of *free-range thinking* for more details on how to properly prepare an agenda.)

2. When people **enter**, what will they see or experience that immediately signals an interesting and engaging meeting?

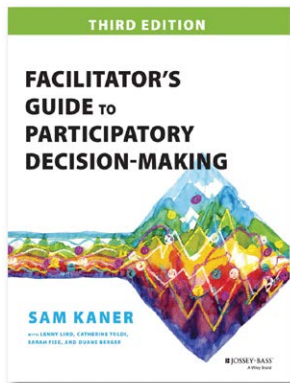
At a recent Grantmakers for Effective Organizations' conference, a session was held entitled, "We Are All Disaster Funders." Session designers wanted to help grantmakers understand that - normal funding priorities aside - they may very well find themselves making emergency relief grants in the wake of a hurricane, flood, tornado or earthquake.

To set the stage for this discussion (literally), tables in the meeting room were each identified by a particular kind of natural disaster (see illustration below). On entering, attendees were asked to sit at the table where, based on their foundation's location, that particular kind of natural disaster could affect them.



3. How will we **engage** attendees throughout the meeting to make sure they are active participants?

Simple: buy Sam Kaner's outstanding book, *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making*, and read it cover to cover. You'll find proven techniques for helping quiet people speak up, getting loud people to shut up, and helping groups in conflict find their way to consensus.



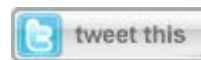
4. When attendees **exit**, how do we close the meeting to ensure the desired follow-up actions?

First, recognize that endings are an important part of every meeting. A meeting shouldn't end simply because time ran out. Meeting planners will often relegate the least important items to the final few minutes of the agenda, and while it makes sense to put first things first, you don't want participants leaving the room with the last inspirational message being, "And please don't leave dirty dishes in the sink." As people leave, they should know exactly what's expected of them and by what date and time.

5. After the meetings, what can we do to **extend** its impact?



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Several years ago, Heal the Bay, an environmental nonprofit based in Santa Monica, conducted a campaign called "The Forty Day Fight." At the launch event, attendees were asked to make calls and send letters and faxes to a local water resource control board that was about to make a crucial decision affecting Southern California's coastal waters.

As guests arrived and checked in at the launch event, they received name tags - the usual rectangular plastic holder with a paper insert for their name and organization. Hidden behind the insert, however, was a second piece of paper the guests didn't know about.

After a series of speakers fired up the group about the importance of flooding the water resource board with public comments, the final speaker asked the guests to remove their tags and find the hidden piece of paper. What they found was a specific date falling within the forty-day lobbying period. "This is your day," the speaker declared, explaining that each attendee would receive a call from a campaign volunteer on their assigned day reminding them to send their message.

And allow me to add a sixth E for *effort*. Good meetings don't just happen. They take careful planning, but if you spend a little more time working through Doblin's five E's before holding your next meeting, I'm confident those efforts will be rewarded.

(Special thanks to Chris Ertel and Lisa Kay Solomon, co-authors of the new book, *Moments of Impact: How to Design Strategic Conversations That Accelerate Change*, in which I first learned about the Five-E Model.)

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## Not Talking Points, *Connecting* Points

*Learn how to engage and motivate your audience in our May webinar.*

**Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter** shows how three classic public interest campaigns engaged and motivated their target audiences and achieved remarkable results. In reviewing these success stories, we'll cover:

- The basics of framing
- Message creation and delivery
- An easy-to-use template for campaign design

The webinar is divided into two one-hour classes that will be held on May 12th and 19th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p ET) each day. Tuition is \$250 per student and discounts are available for organizations that register 3 or more students. Learn more and register at [The Goodman Center](#).



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