
7 Strategies for Handling Last Minute Meetings

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Have you ever found yourself having to scramble to organize a meeting at the last minute? Wouldn't it be nice that if and when this daunting situation arose, you were well prepared with all necessary information ready at your fingertips? That's why I've developed the following seven survival strategies to help you plan for the inevitable, because you know as well as I, it's going to happen "someday."

Survival Strategy #1. Question the meeting need.

Before you jump into automatic pilot to start your last minute meeting organization, challenge the request. Since deciding to hold a meeting demands serious consideration because of the costs involved, both direct and indirect, double-check the rationale for holding the meeting. Develop a few pertinent questions to ask and find out if a meeting alternative, such as a teleconference would achieve the same results.

Survival Strategy #2. Know the basics.

If the meeting really needs to happen, make sure that you plan for the basics:

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- Where should it take place – on or off-site?
- When is it scheduled for – date and time?
- What's the meeting agenda?
- Who needs to be invited?
- What refreshments and snacks are needed?
- What specific materials and equipment is needed?
- What travel and hotel arrangements, if any, are necessary?
- What's the meeting budget?

When it comes to budget, remind your boss that good quality, last minute buying and cheap don't usually correlate. The reality is that last minute pricing may well come at a premium.

Survival Strategy #3. Develop checklists.

Checklists should be every meeting planners' guardian angel. They're there to help out in time of trouble and avoid unnecessary panic. With the hundreds of pieces that make up the meeting puzzle, the only way to put them together and keep tabs on all the details is with a checklist. Become a checklist fanatic and consider having a checklist for each checklist. Cover all your bases. The more thorough you are, the greater the probability of success, even at the last minute.

Survival Strategy #4. Create a contact list.

When you need something in a hurry who do you call? These are the people who need to make up your contact list. Consider your facility needs, catering, audio-visual, etc. Compile a list with phone including cell phones, fax and email information. Keep this list updated annually as contacts and their information can change. Also include useful website resources as you find them, but remember to check them out beforehand.

Survival Strategy #5. Build relationships.

Don't wait until you need a favor from someone, rather continually find ways to build a "dream team" or support network. Build a contact base of other meeting professionals, suppliers, vendors and angels you can call on at the last minute to help you out. Take time to discuss their strategies and resources for dealing with last minute meetings, and add this information to your "survival kit." Don't forget to include your fellow co-workers who might be willing and able to help out at a moment's notice.

Survival Strategy #6. Develop contingencies.

Because your plans are last minute, the greater the chance of something not working out the way you'd like it to. So what's your backup? If you don't have one, all your original plans could be destroyed in an instant, and you'll be scrambling even more than before to put a second strategy into operation. Have a Plan B ready "in the wings" just in case you need it. Once again, the more thorough you are, the greater the probability of pulling off this miracle.

Survival Strategy #7. Learn to laugh.

Keeping a sense of humor will definitely help prevent you getting mad, angry and frustrated with those disorganized managers who leave things to the last minute and expect you to perform miracles. Learn to laugh at them and yourself to keep a saner perspective on life. If nothing else, remember that laughing is a great survival technique, which is good for your health and will help reduce stress and blood pressure levels.