

9 Tips to Control Every Meeting and Get What You Want



Are you nailing job interviews, closing new clients, and maximizing every meeting? Most likely you aren't, but I'll show you how I blew a huge meeting and what you can learn from my mistakes.

Bottom line . . . you need to prepare for key meetings. It doesn't matter if you are on an interview, auditioning for a TV show, meeting a prospect for your business, or trying to get your kid into a swanky private school. It doesn't matter if the meeting is at your office or theirs. You need to invest some of your other 8 hours into preparing for your big meetings.

Why? It's simple. If you don't prepare for a meeting, someone else will control it. If you have something important to say, you might not get the chance to share it. And when I say "control," I don't mean some Machiavellian thing where you need to dominate the

discussion. Control the meeting means you know what you want to say and that you navigate the discussion to make sure your key points are addressed.

Here's my story . . . a couple of months ago I blew a big opportunity because I didn't prepare for a meeting. It was such a unique opportunity that I've been thinking about it ever since. Sadly, I came to the conclusion that I've been blowing meetings for a long time. It's easy to dismiss the small ones, but let me tell you, it's much harder to forget the big ones — they will haunt you.

One of my favorite sayings is “luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” For an always-planning productivity nut like me, I've relished this quote. It is one of the things that has kept me going.

So how did I blow this big opportunity? Ironically, I didn't prepare for a key meeting. I thought I could wing it. I couldn't.

The meeting started great. Nailed the pleasantries. Discussed my background with confidence. I was even witty! “This is going great,” I remember thinking. And then the questions came. Uh, questions?! Hum . . . I guess I should have expected some of these, but alas, I didn't.

So I did what anyone would have done, I fired back answers — one after another. I was on. Give me another! You think that's a good question? Bam! Take that!

This went on for a good 30 minutes. The meeting ended, we shook hands, and I walked back to my car feeling good. It's an hour plus drive from Los Angeles to Orange County, and all I could do was think about the meeting. When I left LA I felt on top of the world, but an hour later as I exited the freeway, I was feeling like a schmuck.

I relived the entire meeting several times, and each time I thought of something I should have said — not just little tweaks here and there, but changes that would have been 100x better than what I actually said.

And how long did it take me to come up with these great answers? About 30 minutes. Yup, just 30 minutes. I preach using the other 8 hours to create new wealth and purpose, and I didn't invest 30 minutes preparing for a huge opportunity that would have created new wealth and purpose for me. Schmuck, indeed.

The next day I got the call I was expecting . . . “Thanks so much for coming, but we are going in a different direction.” I deserved that. I really did. But, I promise I will not blow another opportunity because I'm not prepared.

Here are nine tips I will use to prepare for my next big meeting that you can use, too:

1. **Determine the “one thing.”** Never go into a meeting without a crystal clear purpose. Answer this question to determine the purpose: “After the meeting is over, what has to happen for me to feel happy with the result?” This “one thing” will be your destination to which everything else should lead.
2. **Focus on three talking points.** You want to avoid “diarrhea of the mouth” as one of my teachers used to say. In other words, don’t blather on and on about every single idea or thought you have. Go into the meeting with just three ideas, thoughts, or points that support your “one thing” and focus the entire meeting around these.
3. **Be a politician.** Ever notice when politicians are asked a question they always seem to steer the answer to their main talking points? This can be annoying when the answer has little to do with the question, so I’d make sure that you answer the question, but then immediately follow it up with one of your talking points.
4. **Create sound bites.** Flip on any news broadcast or read any newspaper and you will see the sound bite in action. A sound bite is a short quote used by the media to summarize an important point or add flavor to their story. **President Obama** can give an hour speech, but the six-second snippet you see on CNN is the sound bite. A good speechwriter will know which two or three sound bites will make the news the next day, and if you want to create maximum impact with your meetings, you will want to create a few of your own sound bites.
5. **Create an agenda.** If possible, create a physical agenda that is centered around your “one thing” and supports your talking points. She who creates the agenda, almost always controls the meeting. Starting out in my career, I’d always create the agenda — even if I didn’t call the meeting. I was always surprised when executives much more senior than me would strictly follow the agenda. By creating the agenda, I controlled the meeting.
6. **Nail the intro and the close.** I can’t stress this enough. Go in with a strong opening and you’ll feel more confident throughout. Make sure it covers your main talking points. Also make sure you have a strong close that reiterates your main talking points. Don’t wing this.
7. **Call to action.** What is the action you want your meeting attendees to take? What action must they take for you to feel happy with the meeting? Most meetings end and nobody is sure what the next steps are. Make sure everyone knows exactly what the next action is.
8. **After the meeting.** Just because the meeting ends doesn’t mean your job is over. Often it is just getting started. Make sure you follow-up with key attendees. Send an email or write a note. And of course, make sure you subtly reinforce your “one thing” and talking points.
9. **Listen.** Last, but arguably most important, listen. Don’t be so wired to your talking points that you turn into a robot spewing forth canned lines. It’s a meeting, not a presentation. It needs to be dynamic.

I've forgiven myself for blowing my big meeting, but when you use your other 8 hours effectively, it's surprising how often "big" opportunities present themselves. Next time, I'll follow my own advice and nail it.