

## **CEO Tip of the Month: How to Make Managerial Board and Senior Management Meetings More Productive**

by Guido Quelle

First a brief observation: I see it time and time again that, especially in mid-sized enterprises, there are no Senior Management meetings at all, let alone clearly structured ones. So: If your company doesn't organize such meetings, it's high time it started to.

If you had a freighter ship that could carry 1,000 tons of cargo, would you fill it up with 1,500 or even 2,000 tons of goods, and then leave part of the cargo hold empty so that anyone who wanted to could still throw anything on board that they didn't manage to get packed up before it leaves port? Not likely. But that's exactly what many meetings of the Senior Management or Managerial Board look like: The agenda, assuming there is one, is packed with 50 to 100 percent too many points, and at the end, say around agenda point number 17, comes "Other Business." It's the perfect recipe for frustration.

One thing at a time: Senior Management and Managerial Board meetings can offer valuable tools for promoting growth, provided they fulfill ten conditions:

1. They are held on a regular basis, i.e., at least every two weeks. If this format is something new, it is advisable to use a weekly rhythm for the first two months so that everyone can get accustomed to it.
2. For members of the Senior Management, participation is mandatory. To allow for vacation, potentially more important appointments and unforeseen events, a limited number of permitted absences per participant can be agreed upon.
3. There is a standard agenda that can accommodate special topics and also includes breaks—e.g. for making phone calls.
4. There is a goal that should be reached in the meeting—and for every topic. A helpful pattern: I-D-C: Is the goal simply to inform, to discuss, or to make a choice?
5. Except for the Senior Management, only those people who actually have something to contribute should take part, and should only be there for the duration of the relevant agenda point(s).
6. There is a moderator, who can either be someone external or a member of the Senior Management. If the latter is the case, it shouldn't always be the CEO who moderates; instead, there should be a rotation of this responsibility among the Senior Management.
7. Everyone sticks to the agenda.
8. Minutes are recorded and sent to all participants no later than 48 hours after the meeting. The minutes should also include work packages.
9. All smartphones and laptops are turned off, unless they are needed to discuss the content at hand.
10. If someone is unprepared for their topic, said topic is postponed without further discussion and the person in question is reprimanded. If a topic is to be covered that requires all participants to prepare in advance, but the necessary paperwork was not provided to them in time: Here, too, postpone the topic and reprimand the person responsible for the blunder.

The standard agenda should always include the following elements:

- o News: Should be the first point on the agenda. Here, those things that the other members of the Senior Management should be aware of are talked about (in a purely informative manner) within a fixed timeframe. Clarifying questions are allowed; in-depth discussions are not, and would require a separate agenda point.
- o Status quo: Here the focus should be on growth-relevant information: Revenues, the latest performance figures, important customers gained or lost, and the outlook.
- o Personnel: Personnel changes, new employees and their responsibilities, personnel bottlenecks.
- o Status of relevant key projects, especially those intended to expand your business. The prerequisite is a prioritized list of the company’s key projects. By no means should every single project be mentioned. Also, the activities between now and the next meeting should be covered.

As a rule, this standard leaves room for additional agenda points, provided there are mandatory meetings scheduled for (at least) half a day to a day, every two weeks. The effects: more commitment, less frustration and more growth.

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