



Group Decision Tip

E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions

Objectives, Agenda, Ground Rules

In principle, when we are meeting as a group to make decisions it helps if everyone knows what we expect to achieve (meeting objectives) and how we expect to achieve it (agenda and ground rules).

Naming the objectives up front minimizes chances for mismatched expectations. The objectives also provide an anchor if things start to go adrift. Agendas also help people know what to expect; and when the group agrees to a specific agenda it serves as a mandate to move from one item to the next in a deliberate and honorable way. Ground rules also help us be efficient. And they remind us to be respectful of each other. Ground rules are shared expectations about how we will interact.

All three - objectives, agenda, ground rules - combine to establish a safe structure within which creativity may flourish.

Practical Tip: At the start of every meeting review the meeting objectives, agenda and ground rules, in that order, even if very briefly. It is helpful if group members agree to them (with revisions if necessary) and agree to implement them. If the group seems to be straying from the agenda or if people seem to be ignoring the ground rules, stop, point out the discrepancy, and ask either for compliance or for the agenda or ground rules be changed. When behavior gets out of sync with established expectations, safety fades, creativity suffers, and frustration results.

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Good Group Decisions, Inc.

98 Maine Street, Brunswick, ME 04011
Phone: 207-729-5607

craig@goodgroupdecisions.com

www.GoodGroupDecisions.com
Fax: 207-725-8710

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