

Taking a Break

If it's a long meeting, find a logical place to take a break. Not the lengthy fifteen-minute coffee break where everyone leaves the room (unless it's a three-hour session), but an informal break in the proceedings that feeds everyone and gives a bit of respite.

Let me illustrate this with a story:

When I began as a daily talk show host in Boston, guests arrived at about 7:45 in the morning. No one had ever thought to feed them beyond the proverbial cup of coffee. Yet we were asking a *great* deal of them: early rising, giving out to me and an audience in a pressured environment, and affording them very limited time to talk about their favorite subject. Instituting a little tray of goodies made a *tremendous* difference. It served to loosen people up, to become much more comfortable and available and much less defensive and nervous. It works!

Recap Each Segment

Don't leave any topic till you've gone over your What, How, Who, When—the notes you've been writing on the board. This makes for a true consensus, allowing for final discussion to clarify any points or argue out the last problems that possibly remain.

Keep to the Time Allotments

Have a clock visible in your meeting area. Ask everyone to monitor the clock as you remind them (and point out on your agenda on the flip chart) of the time allotment for that item. Give two or three warnings during a discussion, not just one. This gives people a chance to adjust their presentation. Make the group a party to your need to end items and move on.

Though others in the group may do it for you, generally the leader is called upon to handle long-winded people. Try a gentle "I don't think that's really relevant to this discussion, so in the interest of time, let's table that for another meeting," or, "You know, that aspect isn't really helpful to solving the problem at hand. Let's hold that. If it's an item you want us to consider, bring it up for the next agenda." *Always* save face for your people publicly.