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# How To Master Boring Meetings-- Even If You're Not In Charge



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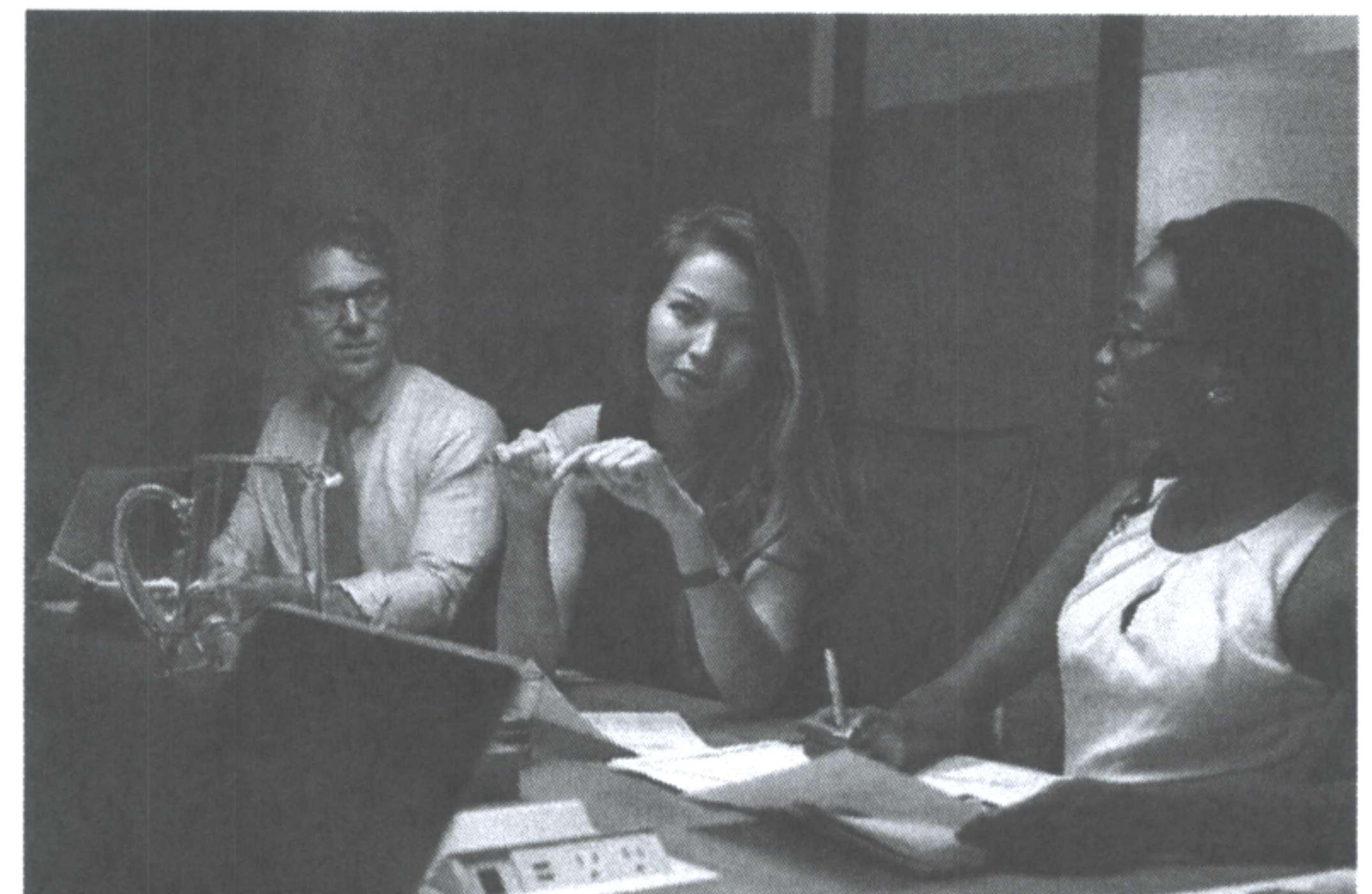
Charles Kettering, the famed inventor and head of research at GM once observed, “A problem well stated is a problem half solved.”



Just as your GPS recalculates when you miss a turn, help your wayward colleagues reassess and stay on task when they stray from the main discussion.

By Dianna Booher

Chances are you’re going to attend meetings and more meetings this year: strategic meetings, planning meetings, staff meetings. Some will produce results; others, only boredom.



Become known as a valuable contributor. ICLIPART

Granted, much of the blame for nonproductive meetings lies at the feet of the facilitator. But that’s another article altogether. If you’re trapped in a meeting meant to solve a significant issue yet you hear disaster unfolding all around, step up. Seize the opportunity to turn the impending mishap into a worthwhile effort—even when you’re “just” a participant rather than the leader.

Being known as someone who “keeps the meeting on track” can quickly establish your reputation as a valuable contributor. Here’s how to make that happen:


## Delivering Results When You’re NOT the Meeting Leader



## Ask for the Roadmap

When meeting leaders show up without an agenda, subtly put them on the spot with questions like these: “What are we covering today?” “What’s on the agenda today and in what order? I need to let someone know the least disruptive time for me to step out for 10 minutes?” “What are we discussing today? Should we have any specific data with us?” Gradually, the leader will get the point about the usefulness of an agenda.

## Reframe the Issue to Be Resolved or Decided

Meeting discussions often flounder because the leader has failed to state the issue either clearly or succinctly. Do both and you will stand out in the group. Charles Kettering, the famed inventor and head of research at GM once observed, “A problem well stated is a problem half solved.” 

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For example, as your team struggles with a budget cut and brainstorms cheaper ways to market your services, you might reframe the issue so that the group refocuses in a completely new way: “What firm would like the opportunity to enter an arrangement with us, whereby they market our services in exchange for the leads to upsell their own products?”

Your reframing spurs creative thinking.

## Lead by Asking Strategic Questions

When discussions seem to be going in circles or stall altogether, guide from the side. Strategic questions prompt the group to deeper thinking: What’s the purpose behind X? Are there other ways to accomplish the goal other than what



we've tried in the past? How is this done in other industries? Would all experts in the field agree with what you've just said? What do you think their perspective and feedback on this issue would be? Any precautions? Their expected payoffs?

## **Identify and Quash Sidetracking Issues and Questions**

Some meeting participants fail to follow the meeting process: issue, reporting, analysis, discussion, summary, decision. Instead, it's as if they wander off into never-never land for long periods and then pop to attention sporadically for the sole purpose of asking a side-tracking question. Don't follow them on such rabbit trails.

Stay aware of where you are in the meeting process on each given topic. Just as your GPS recalculates when you miss a turn, help your wayward colleagues reassess and stay on task when they stray from the main discussion. 🐦

Try these recalibrating statements: "You may be right, Kristen. Let's put that idea in the parking lot for a later discussion. Back to the issue of..." Or: "That's an intriguing question. But first, we need to decide how to ..."

## **Call for Accountability**

How many times have you walked out of a meeting thinking, "So what did we decide?" or "So who's doing what now?" Don't let that happen in those meetings you attend. If your meeting leader fails to summarize conclusions and assign tasks, then become the accountability cop: "What did we decide about X?" "Who's going to be responsible for Y?" "What should be our next steps to get Z done?" "Who wants to volunteer to do A?"

If you're attending a meeting that doesn't deliver, your own competence and credibility are on the line. So make that meeting matter. Your reputation with colleagues will soar.

*Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 47 books. Her newest is Communicate Like a Leader. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and @DiannaBooher.*



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