
Ask the Genie!

Dear Genie,

I'm a project manager leading a team of eight cross functional employees on a six month project. We have frequent team meetings (at least once a week), but we seem to always start late because one or two people consistently show up late. It has seemed to become "the norm" for us, and I can tell that "the tardiness disease" is spreading throughout the team. The other day I overheard one team member tell a new team member that she shouldn't worry too much about showing up on time because the meetings always start late. That can't be good....help! Lucy in Los Angeles

Dear Lucy,

At least take solace in knowing that *you're not alone!* Many project managers and team leaders struggle with this common problem. Make no mistake - your team is looking for a clear signal from you to indicate that the behavior is not desirable or acceptable. Here are just a few techniques you can use (more to come in future posts):

- Develop a ground rule that the team will start on time and not backtrack for latecomers
- Inquire as to why the lateness is occurring – possibly there is a systemic problem that could be addressed by changing the meeting time, duration, or location?
- **DEBRIEF YOUR MEETINGS!** – This is such a powerful technique that so many facilitators ignore. At the end of the meeting (or call) ask each person to share one thing that worked well during the meeting and one thing that could have been done differently. If this is an issue, someone will mention it, and that provides a perfect platform for you to ask the group how it should be handled (e.g. *"Some of you mentioned the fact that we seem to get a late start. How should we handle that going forward?"*) If the violators are only one or two, they will likely accept responsibility and recommit to timeliness. If it's a systemic issue impacting everyone, this will surface the issue.
- If there are only one or two consistent violators, talk to them offline. Inquire as to why they're having a problem making it to the meetings on time (possibly there is an issue that you're not aware of) and emphasize the importance of their role and the impact of their tardiness on the entire team.
- Consider using a carrot or a stick. Some teams use food, ice breakers or other "carrots" that are only available at the beginning of the meeting to entice people to show up on time. Other teams use the "stick approach" where they've agreed that the last person to show up must take notes for the next meeting or must sing a stanza of a song.

If you have a question that you'd like to pose to the Meeting Genie, send it (along with your name and city) to askgenie@meetinggenie.com