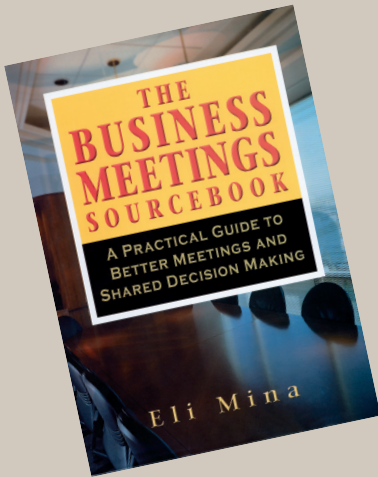


A MEETING OF THE MINDS

Everything you wanted to know about meetings – and then some.



The Business Meeting Source Book

A Practical Guide to Better Meetings and Shared Decision Making

Eli Mina

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reviewed by Laureen Griffin

Most people tolerate meetings, some dread corporate get-togethers more than the dentist, but Eli Mina celebrates meetings. Mina luxuriates in them. A professional meeting facilitator, seminar leader and management consultant from Vancouver, Mina seems to live in meeting rooms. He has chaired contentious meetings, mediated organizational disputes and trained others to conduct purposeful meetings.

This is not a book for one sitting or even 10. It is a dipping book. Running your first meeting? Take a dip. Attending meetings that drone on and on, yet nothing is ever resolved? Take a dip. If you're replacing a CEO with a top-down style, and you would like to hear what the staff really thinks, well, you might want to forgo a dip for a five-lap swim.

The book is divided into two sections. The first seven chapters discuss the foundations

for shared decision-making. When do you want to share the power to make decisions and when is it a rotten idea? There are questionnaires to help you determine your effectiveness as a team leader and to rate each of your team members. In exhaustive detail, Mina explains the many roles of a team leader. He uses examples to illustrate various situations that a leader may encounter, including participants who talk too much, too little, or simply don't show up. He provides scripts for dealing with difficult team members and bosses in various situations. He even has a script for the leader's apology to the team. (Perhaps he secretly aspires to write for Broadway.)

But unless you are actually in the situation described, Mina's scripts will tend to lack drama, partly due to his advocacy of politically correct language. These scripts teach you to eliminate all emotion from an exchange, and when disagreeing with someone's opinions or behaviour, use only the most sensitive language.

Mina believes in the adage: tell them what you are going to say, say it and then tell them what you said. While this is not a fatal flaw in a reference book, it makes dull reading if you peruse the book for more than a few pages at a time. He is also a devotee of checklists. And it is checklists that compose most of the second half of the book. Heaven forbid you should be wearing many hats going to a meeting; you would have to stay up all night to go through your many checklists. There's a checklist for the meeting facilitator, the planning coordinator, the timing master, the agenda master, the logistics master, the invitation master, etc. Just call Mina the checklist *meister*. This is just under the chapter for planning a meeting; there are more checklists for participants, facilitators, presenters, greeting masters and minute takers under the preparation for launch. The next five chapters provide scripts, case studies, and bulleted

points for each stage of the meeting and each participant's role at each stage. Much of the information presented in these chapters was presented earlier in the first section of the book. In this case, repetition is an advantage since, to repeat myself, you are only going to dip in and out of the book.

Mina is well known in credit union circles, and one of the charms of the book is the examples drawn from credit unions. One credit union minimized the adversarial relationship between the board of directors and members by rearranging the set-up at its annual meeting. Instead of having the directors sit at the front of the room facing the members, they sat among the members at round tables. Only the president sat at the front of the room and a podium was used for reports and presentations. Instead of a few members dominating the meeting with the remainder simply observing the proceedings, everyone was able to speak to at least one director. Following the formal presentations, each director led a round-table discussion garnering a number of creative and practical ideas for the board to consider.

Mina cites another credit union that needed to cut costs and chose to resolve its problems by reducing the number of hours it was open. Unfortunately, it did so on short notice without consulting either staff or members.irate members vented their frustration at the front-line staff who were already peeved and afraid of losing their jobs. A reporter published the story and a public relations nightmare followed. Mina points out that the entire debacle could have been avoided if the credit union had spelled out the problem to both staff and members and asked for ideas to resolve the situation.

In short, this is a useful book for your library. You will consult it frequently, and if you are an insomniac, you may have found the magic elixir. **E**