

Making the Most of Meetings

Meetings are our most important tool of persuasion. It is through these face-to-face interactions that we are most likely to persuade decision makers. Here we lay out a number of ways to make the most of meetings.

Making the most of meetings was written by [Emma Burnell](#), Journalist, Political Consultant and Director of [Political Human](#).

Persuasion

Persuasion is essential to campaigners. It is what we do. But because it is the air that we breath, we don't always take the time to think about how we do it or even what it is.

- Persuasion has a goal and the intent to achieve that goal. It is not accidental.
- The means to achieving that goal is through communication.
- The recipient comes to be persuaded through free will not coercion.
- Persuasion will result either in a shift of attitude or an increase in salience of an already held attitude or belief. That attitude change will be shown in a change of behaviour.

Preparation

Time is often our most precious commodity. If someone is giving you theirs – respect that and the value of your own time and do your preparation.

You should prepare a full briefing pack with all of the following information:

How did the meeting come about? Did you request it or did they? This will give you an understanding of their priorities and how they might be viewing the meeting. If they requested it, you could be pushing at a more open door.

What role could they play in your campaign/wider goals? What do you actually want them to do? This is key, but you should also have a ladder of asks so that if they can't fulfil your first priority, you can still walk away with a win.

What have they previously said/written on the topic? What other related topics do they have a history with? This will give you an understanding of where they stand and how much background briefing they require. If they have already covered it widely, then you don't want to patronise them. You should also refer to their writing in the meeting to show you understand their position.

Prepare your talking points and statistics and have them written down. Take this in with you. A meeting is NOT an exam – it's fine to take your notes with you.

Have a sense of the journey you want the meeting to go on. You won't necessarily get to direct this completely but knowing where you want to go will stop you from getting derailed.

On Arrival

Be early. Again, this is about respecting the time you've been given and using your own wisely. If you arrive early you can take time to huddle with your colleagues and talk strategy. If you're on your own it gives you a chance to go over your briefing pack.

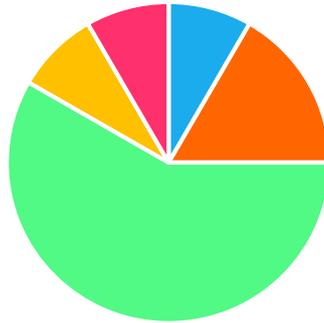
If you are meeting an MP, you will almost certainly be greeted by their assistant. These are very important people. Treat them as you would the person you're meeting. Assistants are MPs eyes and ears. Make sure they see and hear you at your best.

Timing

Think about how to use your time effectively. This doesn't mean being all business – chatting and getting to know each other is important. But it does mean thinking about how to ensure that you don't run out of time to get to the essence of your point.

Below is a chart that shows a rough breakdown of how time in a meeting should be spent. Don't be too rigid though! Let the person you're influencing guide you. If they are chatty be chatty. If they aren't – don't force it.

Meeting time



■ Greetings ■ Chatting ■ Business ■ Agreement of next steps ■ Farewell

Negotiation

Outline your case in the way you think will be most persuasive. Be clear on what you are asking for and back it up with facts, figures and case studies. Watch what they respond to and lean in to that. So, if they are particularly interested in stats – give them more.

Listen to what they want and think about how that lines up with your case. The trick is to find common ground and then try to expand it. Be ok about hearing a no. You won't always get 100% of what you want straight away. Make sure you take a no in the right spirit and find a way of moving the relationship forward. Make sure you have a back-up set of asks if they first ones seem unattainable. That way you will get something from the meeting even if it isn't your main aim.

If you disagree in the meeting, make sure you don't take this personally. Stay calm and if possible, try to outline the parameters of the disagreement and move the discussion back onto common ground.

Saying No

Sometimes it will be you who has to say no. Again, it's not personal. You are doing your job. But you need to make sure you do so professionally. Be respectful of the needs of the other person. Be assertive, but be willing to find a compromise if it exists and even if it doesn't, try to find common ground to finish on. Make sure you leave the door open to further collaboration in the future.

Finishing a meeting

Make sure you are keeping your eye on the time, but also you can usually feel when the meeting is drawing to a close. When it is it is time to stop negotiating. At this point you should reflect back what has been agreed verbally and agree follow up actions and a timetable. If it seems possible, try to arrange a next meeting or contact.

Following up

When you return to your desk from a meeting, make sure you send an email as soon as possible with all the agreed actions and timeline. Then make sure you build these into your diary and to do list. Deliver on time and if you can't make sure you explain why in plenty of time.