

## 14 Ways to Bring Value to Your Company's Town Hall Meetings

- 1. Pare down the PowerPoint.** Corporate America loves its slides, but keep the presentation lean, with supporting visuals and brief bullet points. This forces leaders to look at the audience and talk more informally.
- 2. Get off the script.** It's okay to improvise. Coach senior leaders to talk from the brief points in the deck instead of fully scripted remarks. Any hope of building trust through spontaneity and candor is lost when the presenter sounds over-rehearsed.
- 3. Expand presenters beyond the core leadership team.** Have a project manager present the latest product offering or give a business update alongside the leader sponsoring it. This gives rank-and-file employees exposure and feels more conversational.
- 4. Set up a mock interview.** If you're discussing a dry topic, keep your audience from dozing off by using a talk show-style interview format, with a member of the communications team "interviewing" the leader.
- 5. Include a panel discussion.** Seat members of leadership team (and even some "regular" employees) casually in front of the group, and have questions on hand (solicited ahead of time) if there are none initially. Place pens and index cards at each seat in the meeting for employees to submit anonymously.
- 6. Understand that not everyone will feel comfortable speaking up in a town hall.** It's wise to offer other, less public forums for discussion with senior leadership, such as fireside chats, blogs and informal lunches. Former Autodesk CEO Carol Bartz hosted "Coffee with Carol" sessions peppered with her dry wit and informal style.
- 7. Use faces.** Incorporate images of employees and customers whenever possible. Audiences enjoy watching videos of team events or employees interviewed on camera about their jobs.
- 8. Intersperse heavy and light news.** They do it on the evening newscast: Keep your audience's attention by alternating performance updates with employee recognition pieces.
- 9. Get the audience involved.** Ask employees' opinions on key business issues and priorities throughout the meeting using interactive polling devices, if available (a show of hands will work too.) You can also ask fun questions to build community, such as "If our department were a movie, what would it be?"
- 10. Send out the agenda ahead of time.** Give employees a taste of what they can look forward to at the meeting. And make sure it's something YOU would want to go to!
- 11. Do something totally unexpected.** When appliance manufacturer Whirlpool introduced a strategy aimed at connecting emotionally with customers, it deviated from its logic-grounded traditions. A senior leader performed a mock strip tease before employees, revealing an "I ♥ Whirlpool" tee under his suit. A surprise doesn't have to involve burlesque – what about bringing in an unannounced guest speaker, such as a respected retiree or community leader?
- 12. Make it mandatory.** Require senior leaders go to the town hall (even if they're just sitting in the audience), thereby setting a good example. Strongly advise them against grumbling about the meeting "taking up valuable time," and also ensure that hourly workers and those in remote locations can participate, either via meetings on the plant floor or videoconference.
- 13. Measure.** Ask participants to complete a brief (seven questions or less) survey, printed or electronic, immediately after the meeting. Emphasize that their feedback will directly drive the next town hall agenda and format.
- 14. Recap the meeting.** Send out a brief synopsis of the topics covered, questions asked with corresponding answers and how management intends to act on those queries.

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