



Episode 51: The Best Way to Prepare for Meetings

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Here are my starting questions today: How many meetings have you already had this week? How'd they go? Which meetings could have gone better?

For many of my clients, work equals meetings. Often, work equals lots of meetings, all day, every day. My clients tell me they've been in meetings since early that morning, or they've been in back-to-back meetings.

Meetings are one of the most valuable tools of work. They're how we build relationships, they're how ideas get shared, and they're how decisions get made.

Meetings are a gift of people's time, energy, and brain power.

Yet, how often do we underappreciate this gift? Meaning, how often do you just show up for a meeting without taking a few moments to set an intention, collect your thoughts, and clarify your talking points?

Meetings without preparation and intention miss an opportunity for focus and productivity. Meetings in which people show up unprepared can lead to others feeling frustrated and like it was not a good use of their time.

That's no fun. And it's not helpful.

My job as a coach is to help people think clearly, feel empowered, and take action to achieve what's important to them.

Often, our coaching conversations revolve around meetings, because certain meetings can cause anxiety. My goal as a coach is to help people feel empowered and know how to use those most effectively.

I want my clients to walk (or Zoom) into a meeting feeling confident, clear, and goal-oriented so that they can walk or Zoom out feeling proud of how they showed up, what they shared, and the information they gathered.

Today's episode will help you shift your meeting worries into meeting empowerment.

I'll share a framework for the best way to prepare for meetings so that you can feel clear going into a meeting and proud coming out.

This framework has two main pieces to think through.

The first piece is clarifying the thoughts and ideas you want to share. A big idea I share with all my clients is that we get to tell people the conclusions we want them to draw about us. People – even

people we have worked with or lived with for years – cannot read our minds. They can't see into our brains or hearts. If you want others to know what you're thinking, you need to be explicit and tell them.

The first part of meeting preparation is to consider this question:

What 3 things do I want the other person to know about what I'm thinking, feeling, or wanting?

We have many thoughts in our brain, and there are many things that we could share with someone else. We want to make the most use of our meeting time. Asking and answering this question is an opportunity to engage our prefrontal cortex, higher level thinking and choose the thoughts we see as most relevant and important to set the stage for the conversation.

Here's an example. A client was preparing for a meeting with her team member during their company's reorg. She was worried about how the team member was feeling and she wanted to show up intentionally.

I asked her, what are the 3 big ideas you want this person to know?

Talking this through, she realized that she wanted the person to know these main points.

One, that she was grateful and valued all of his contributions during the past few years and clearly saw his growth.

Two, that she was working hard to find a place in the company where he could lean into his strengths and conversations around this were still ongoing.

Three, that she wanted to use their meeting to hear what was on his mind.

There were lots of other things she could have shared – for example, reasons for the reorg or worries about the future.

By taking a few minutes to pause and think it through, she realized that she wanted to keep her initial statements short, sweet, and on a high level.

Clarifying what we want to share and want the other person to know does take slowing down our brain and carving out a few moments of time. When we pause and sort through our usually jumbled thoughts, the most important ones have an opportunity to surface.

When we bring our most focused and important thoughts to a conversation, it sets the container and context for the conversation we do want to have.

Let's move on to part 2 of the framework. In addition to sharing information, meetings are also about learning and gathering information.

Part 2 involves taking a few moments to gather your thoughts and get clear about what you want to understand more deeply from the other person. To do this, you need to pause and reflect on these questions:

What am I most curious about with this other person? What 3 questions do I want to ask?

Many of us do too much telling. We think we know what other people are thinking, and we have points of view we just need the other person to hear.

Meetings are a valuable tool to gather information, and we do that by asking open-ended questions with a mindset of curiosity.

There are many questions one could ask; when we take a few minutes to reflect, we often realize the questions our brain initially jumps to might not be the most helpful ones. When we give our brains a few minutes to sort through all the questions we could ask, we can then intentionally choose questions that can elicit what we really want to know.

Coming back to my client's meeting with her direct report, she and I talked through different questions she could ask. She landed on these:

Question 1, What thoughts do you have about the reorg?

Question 2, How can I be most helpful to you right now?

Question 3, How might this reorg be an opportunity for you to learn and stretch yourself?

After our coaching call and clarifying her telling pieces and her coaching questions, my client felt confident and ready for her meeting. That's the goal.

Let's bring this to you.

Take a moment and pull up your meeting calendar for the week. Choose a meeting that feels most important to you – one in which you want to use your time well or one in which you want to feel especially confident.

Then you'll need to find a few minutes for your mental meeting preparation.

First, think about the three main ideas you want to share. Think about what you want the other person to explicitly hear from you – even if you think they know it, and even if you've said it before. Write these down.

Then, step into your curiosity perspective and think about the 3 questions you have for them. Given the time you have and the goal of the meeting, which 3 questions are most important?

Lastly, make sure to set your intention for the meeting. Presence matters, and choosing and embodying an intention helps us show up the way we want to be perceived. Choose 3 words that reflect what you want others to say about your presence and leadership, and then find the body position that anchors those in your thoughts and energy.

When you use this framework and take time for these steps, you'll know that you're using your time and other people's time most respectfully and effectively. You'll know that you're bringing your most productive and focused thinking to your relationships and your work.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you would like help building your clarity and presence in meetings, please reach out. Email me at deb@debelbaum.com or go to my website debelbaum.com to schedule a consult. I look forward to it. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!