

# The 2002 Annual

## Volume 2 Consulting

Jossey-Bass  
Pfeiffer

## 718. WHAT'S NEXT? BUILDING AN AGENDA\*

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### Goal

- To learn how to build a group agenda prior to a meeting.
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### Group Size

Three or more people who work together regularly.

### Time Required

Ten to fifteen minutes.

### Materials

- Flip chart and felt-tipped markers.

### Physical Setting

The group's regular meeting room.

### Process

1. Either plan a meeting without an agenda or use this activity when a group habitually has no agenda prior to meeting. Ask the group for permission to "build an agenda."
2. Ask: "What do we need to accomplish at this meeting?" Legibly write each idea on a flip chart along with the name of the person who suggested it.
3. As you list topics, make sure to phrase them as outcomes or expected results. Make sure the group understands each outcome and clarify if necessary.

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\*We provide this piece as a service for newer group leaders. It is not, strictly speaking, an experiential learning activity as no learning is involved. However, we believe it to be a useful technique.

4. Once you have the list, ask the group to combine similar topics. If any dissent occurs, assume that the topics are distinct and leave them separate.
5. Ask the person who suggested each topic how long it will take to achieve the desired outcome. If necessary, allow the group to discuss the item for a few seconds. Next to the topic, write down the agreed-on time (e.g., ten minutes). Also ask the person who suggested the topic whether he or she would like to lead the discussion. If not, ask for a volunteer from the rest of the group. Beware of asking only one or two people to lead the discussion of all the items. Rather, make the meeting as participative as possible.
6. Now that you have a list of topics, a time frame, and the leader for each topic, add up the times. If the amount of time needed is less than the amount of time allotted for the meeting, simply start at the top and move down through the list. However, if the estimated time needed is *more* than the time allotted, the group will need to prioritize the list. Depending on your preference, the team may prioritize the list using the 1-2-3 method or the A-B-C method:
  - *1-2-3 Method:* Agree on the most important topic to discuss and place a one (1) beside it, two (2) as next important, etc. Colored dots may also be used to vote, with each team member being given the same number of dots to place beside preferred items. The items receiving the most dots are highest in priority for the group.
  - *A-B-C Method:* Agree that the group will use the "loudest voice wins" to assign the priorities with "A" as vital, that is, "We must accomplish this outcome at this meeting"; B as important, that is, "We should accomplish this outcome"; and C as trivial, "We could do this, but the world won't come to an end if we don't accomplish it today." Quickly go through the list and ask "Is this an A, B, or C?" and write down the most agreed-on letter for each.
7. Assign a timekeeper to keep the team on schedule, then start with the most important items on the list (the 1's or the A's) and move through the agenda for a more effective meeting.

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*Kristin J. Arnold, M.B.A., specializes in coaching executives and their leadership, management, and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic and business planning, process improvement, decision making, and collaborative problem solving. An accomplished author and editor of several professional articles and books, as well as a featured columnist in The Daily Press, a Tribune Publishing newspaper, Ms. Arnold is regarded as an expert in team development and process improvement techniques. With building extraordinary teams as her signature service, she has provided process facilitation, training, and coaching support to both public- and private-sector initiatives.*