Worksheets - Meetings (5): Action points

Read these extracts from a meeting about making the workplace more family-friendly. How many action points are there? Do the participants answer all of these key questions for each action point?

The Five Key Questions for Action Points

- What exactly does the action point involve?
- Who is responsible for performing the action point?
- Who will monitor that person's progress?
- What is the deadline?
- What will happen on that deadline? (How will it be checked and followed up?)

Lara: OK, so we've done really well today in terms of coming up with ideas. I think now it's time to firm things up a little and try to take some of these ideas forward as action points. Er … we talked about setting up a crèche for employees' children, and I think we all agreed this would be something to investigate further. Arnie, you said there's a crèche in our Stockholm office. Can I task you with finding out as much as you can about it?

Arnie: Sure, no problem. I'll be seeing some of the reps from Stockholm in a couple of weeks, so I'll ask them about it when I see them.

Lara: Well, could you send them an email instead? I'd really prefer not to have to wait several weeks. I think we'd need an answer in good time for next month's meeting, where I'd like you to report back on your findings.

Arnie: OK … that's fine. What exactly do you want me to ask in my email?

…

Lara: Great. Well, I suppose we'll also need to look into the legal aspects of having children in the building. I imagine there are all sorts of rules and procedures we need to know about. Would anyone like to volunteer?

Sabina: Yes, I can do that. I'll make a start today.

Lara: That's great. Roy, can you help Sabina out on that? It's quite a big job, I imagine.

Roy: Well, I could, but I'm really busy at the moment with my regular work. Don't forget, I don't have any hours allocated to this project.

Lara: OK, that's a good point. Would you like to be more involved? I mean, would you like me to speak to Niall about getting you some hours allocated to this project?

Roy: Well, perhaps at some stage in the future, but not for at least two months. I'm happy to attend these meetings and contribute ideas, but I've got to put my regular duties first.

Lara: OK, fair enough.

…

Lara: OK, and finally, we need to look into how popular this service would actually be. I suppose some sort of staff survey would be important here, you know, would you use the service, how much would you be willing to pay for it, that sort of thing …

Arnie: So you want employees to pay for it? I thought it was supposed to be free …

Lara: Well, someone's got to pay for it, whether it's the company, which effectively means all the employees, or only the employees that use it. But it's something we need to investigate.

Kelly: Would you like me to organise a staff survey?

Lara: Yes, that would be great.

Kelly: OK, so can I pick your brains at some stage on exactly how to word the survey?

Lara: Well, I think Rachel might be the best person for that. Rachel, can I delegate that job to you?

Rachel: Sure, no problem. We can have a quick meeting tomorrow morning, if you like.

Kelly: Great. That would be really useful.

Lara: Good. And Rachel, can I also ask you to oversee this survey, you know, in terms of making sure Kelly has all the tools she needs to get it done and reported in time for our next meeting?

Rachel: Yes, of course.

Useful phrases for volunteering and delegating

Starting a discussion on action points
- OK, so we've done really well today in terms of _____ up with ideas.
- I think now it's time to _____things up a little and try to _____some of these ideas forward as action points.

Delegating and asking for volunteers
- Can I _____you with finding out as much as you can about it?
- Would anyone like to _____?
- Roy, can you _____Sabina out on that?
- Would you like to be more _____?
- Well, I think Rachel _____be the best person for that.
- Rachel, can I _____that job to you?
- And Rachel, can I also _____you to oversee this survey …?

Accepting
- Sure, _____problem.
- OK … that's fine.
- OK, that's a good point.
- OK, _____enough.
- Yes, that would be great.
- Great. That would be really _____.
- Yes, of course.

Volunteering to help
- I'll be _____some of the reps …, so I'll ask them about it when I see them.
- Yes, I can do that. I'll _____a start today.
- I mean, _____you like me to speak to Niall about …?
- Would you like me to _____a staff survey?
- We can have a quick meeting tomorrow morning, if you _____.

Instructing and setting deadlines
- Well, _____you send them an email instead?
- I'd really _____not to have to wait several weeks.
- I think we'd _____an answer in good time for next month's meeting, where I'd like you to _____back on your findings.

Asking for clarification and advice
- What _____do you want me to ask in my email?
- OK, so can I _____your brains at some stage on exactly how to word the survey?

Making an excuse
- Well, I _____, but I'm really busy at the moment with my regular work.
- Don't _____, I don't have any hours allocated to this project.

Analysis
1.   Which modal verb is most useful for delegating?
2.   Which of the accepting phrases are for accepting a duty, and which are for accepting an excuse? Which are for accepting an offer?
3.   What two verb forms are most often used for volunteering?
4.   What do you notice about the verb forms for instructing and setting deadlines?
5.   What is the most useful word for asking for clarification and advice?

Role-play (1)
Work in groups of around five people. Choose one person to chair your meeting.

You all work for the same organisation. The managers from your head office have asked you to make your premises more suitable for disabled employees and visitors. Some of the ideas that you brainstormed included:

- installing a lift;
- adding a wheelchair ramp to the steps outside the front door;
- replacing the traditional heavy front door with sliding doors;
- training reception staff how to communicate with deaf people;
- making the whole building easier and safer for blind people to explore;
- ensuring all safety procedures, including fire evacuation procedures, are designed with disabled people in mind.

Use these and your own additional ideas to plan a list of action points. Make sure the five key questions have been answered for each action point. Try to use some of the Useful Phrases from this lesson.

Role-play (2)
Work in pairs. One of you should be the chair of the meeting you held earlier. The other person should take all the other roles. Use the six steps (a–f) and the useful language you underlined to bring the meeting to a close.

When you have finished, swap roles. The second time you role-play this situation, try not to look at the list of six steps.

Closing a meeting

1.   In what order would you do the following at the end of a meeting?

a.   AOB
b.   Invite final questions
c.   Plan the next meeting

d.   Signal that people can leave
e.   Summarise the Action Points
f.   Thank people

2.   Read the end of the meeting on making the building more family friendly. In what order does Lara go through the six steps (a–f)?

3.   Underline the key phrases she uses for each step.

4.   What do you notice about the verb forms for talking about Action Points? Why is this different from the earlier part of the meeting?

Lara: OK, great, so I think that's about all for the action points, unless there's something I've missed? No? OK, so the last point on the agenda is Any Other Business. Is there anything else we need to discuss at this stage?

Roy: Well, obviously we'll need to think about budgets at some point.

Lara: Yes, you're right. But I think that's something for our next meeting, once we've got a rough idea of what's feasible. Is there something specific you feel we need to discuss now, or can it wait til we've got more information?

Roy: No, it's fine to leave it til next time, but I'm just worried about wasting a lot of time planning, and then thinking about budgets only as an afterthought, six months into the project.

Lara: OK, that's a good point. I'll add it to next month's agenda. Is there anything else? No? OK, so I just want to go through the list of Action Points. Arnie's going to email Stockholm this week, to find out about their crèche … and you're going to report back to us at our next meeting. Is that OK, Arnie?

Arnie: Yes, that's fine. I'm going to email them tomorrow, in fact.

Lara: Good. Sabina's going to investigate the legal aspects. Again, you're going to report back to us in a month, Sabina?

Sabina: Uh-huh. Unless I find something really important, in which case I'll email everyone straight away.

Lara: Good idea. And Kelly's going to have a meeting with Rachel tomorrow morning, to plan the staff survey … is that right?

Kelly: Yes.

Lara: Good … and you're also going to report back at our next meeting. Wow, it's going to be a busy meeting. We're also going to start thinking about our budget and costs at that meeting. Is there anything I've missed? No? OK, so I'll send round a list of action points tomorrow morning, and a provisional agenda for the next meeting. I suppose we could fix a time and date for that meeting now. How about making it exactly a month from now? That's Wednesday the 11th at 10 o'clock. Is that OK? Excellent.
Right, so are there any final questions?
OK, so thank-you all very much. I think we've had a really productive meeting. Loads of really good ideas, and it really feels as if we're moving forward with this project. Please do keep me informed if you have any problems with your action points. OK, so thanks again everybody, and have a nice day.