



Susanne Gaddis, PhD



Susanne Gaddis PhD  
The Communications Doctor

*"Prescriptions for Effective Communication"*  
www.CommunicationsDoctor.com  
Gaddis@CommunicationsDoctor.com

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## Prescriptions for Listening at Meetings

Dear Communications Doctor,

I feel like I spend about half of my life in meetings. Most of the time I sit and wonder why I'm even there. I don't want to have such a negative outlook. Do you have any suggestions for a worn out and weary meeting goer?

Karen B.- Austin, TX

Dear Karen,

Your question is a confirmation of one of my suspicions regarding the contemporary workplace; that in this setting, like millions of other modern-day workers, you are experiencing a case of "MBO;" commonly referred to as "meeting burn-out." And it's no wonder, as many meetings are inefficient, boring, and often perceived as a waste of people's time. That being said, you are still expected—if not *required*—to be there. Carrying a positive attitude with you to every meeting can work to your professional advantage; in fact, it can make the unbearable seem desirable and even fun! So, the next time you're invited to a meeting, try some of these useful tips to help you make the most of every meeting minute.

**Prescription #1:** Before entering the meeting, identify its purpose. Ask questions such as "What's in it for me?" and "By the end of this meeting, what do I expect to know?" Of course, if your answer to both of these questions is "nothing," you may need to dig deeper to find a purpose. Remember that in every meeting, in addition to gathering information and offering input, you are visible at all times to everyone in attendance. Make it your goal to demonstrate by your words and your actions that you have a positive attitude and are interested in what is being said. Sit up. Look at the person who is speaking. Smile. Acknowledge contributions of others by nodding your head. All of these actions let other people know that rather than just another warm body in the room, you are an active, eager meeting participant.

**Prescription #2:** During the meeting set yourself up to listen. Key questions to ask are "What's being said that I need to know?" and "How do the points being shared during this meeting relate to what I already know?" By asking yourself these questions, your brain will actively seek to find answers.

**Prescription #3:** As each point on the agenda is presented, ask yourself, "What positive contribution can I make." A pair of excellent questions to ask yourself prior to speaking up are "Does what I'm about to say directly relate to the topic at hand," and "What is my point in sharing this information." If you can contribute to the conversation by offering an important insight or fact, *do so*. However, when taking the floor, make sure to keep your comments brief and to the point. . As we all know, there is nothing more irritating than being in a meeting where one or two people rant and ramble with no end in sight.

**Prescription #4:** To help sustain your interest during the meeting, note the actions of the other attendees. Ask yourself questions such as "What am I not noticing that may be important?" or "Can I get any additional information by watching body language?" Valuable insight can be gained by people watching. Be aware of where people are seated. Note behaviors that let you know whether individuals are agreeing or disagreeing with a point that is being made. Be aware of whether the person speaking is using more exclusive "I" and "me" language, or more inclusive "us" "we" and "our," language. All offer great clues for better understanding. As you are making rounds, make sure to watch for "referencing behavior." By becoming aware of who is watching whom when key points are made, you can gain insight into the power structure of individuals in the room.

**Prescription #5:** Take the Meeting Minutes Challenge. During your next meeting, take notes and outline what's being said to build your own set of minutes. Later, compare your notes to the official version sent by the meeting organizer. See whose notes are more complete.

*Susanne Gaddis, PhD, known as the Communications Doctor, is an acknowledged communications expert who has been speaking and teaching the art of effective and positive communication since 1989. Gaddis' workshops, seminars, and keynote presentations are packed with tips and techniques that can be immediately applied for successful results. Gaddis also provides quality training and executive coaching for organizations, corporations, and associations across the United States. For more information, call 919-933-3237 or visit [www.CommunicationsDoctor.com](http://www.CommunicationsDoctor.com).*