

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of Jennifer Selby Long's *Traveling Light*. Are you blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead? *Traveling Light* will skyrocket your impact and lighten the load inherent in your life. It's based on the work of executive coach and management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2008 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

Hold a Successful Meeting: At Last!



Meetings have a bad reputation. It's unfair, really. It's not the meeting's fault. It could be good, if only people would let it.

While heavy-duty or especially difficult meetings require more than a few little tools to be effective, you can vastly improve the outcome of a routine meeting simply by using a mere *five* of my favorite tools. Talk about traveling light!

1. *Invite the right people.* It sounds simple enough, but too often I see topics covered with a full group that only apply to a sub-set of the group, on the excuse that, "this is the only time we have them together." Likewise, if you can't make a decision without Ms. X or Mr. Y, who will not be in attendance, you have to seriously question why you're having the meeting. You're not alone if you've done this. I've been guilty of this sin myself.
2. *Start with a clear objective for the meeting.* And, BTW, don't keep it to yourself! Send it to everyone. Will you be making decisions? Getting input? Sharing feedback? Particularly with routine meetings, it's tempting to hold the meeting because it's what we do, or because you think it provides some sort of bonding, but what are you really trying to accomplish? People don't actually bond very much in unproductive meetings that lack clear objectives.
3. *Set up a successful agenda in advance.* O.k., for some leaders setting an agenda *at all* would be progress! You know who you are. 😊

As you build the agenda, get real about how long it will take to address each topic. You can't treat a complex issue like ongoing poor product quality the same way you treat a status report on a successful project. Yet, how often do we find ourselves in a meeting in which these two topics have roughly the same allocation of time? As a guideline, assume that if the goal is to make a decision, it will take four times longer than if the goal is to simply provide a status report. If you know darn well that the status report will actually stimulate a provocative discussion but no decision is expected to be made, allow twice the time as for a more routine status report.

For what it's worth, eliminate all status reports, if possible. If it's really just a status report, with no discussion needed, email should do the trick.

4. *Visually track problem-solving and decision-making discussions.* If it's a virtual meeting, use a shared document to track the discussion, such as Webex. If everyone is in the same room, or if you're lucky enough to have Telepresence, use a flipchart or whiteboard. I have never understood the allergic reaction some people have to flipcharts. It's not a sign that you're dummies just because you can't remember the key points brought out five or ten minutes ago. There's a lot going on in these meetings, and visual tracking of the content keeps everyone tracking together.
5. *End with "Speak and Listen."* This has become my favorite tool to wrap up a meeting and ensure that what's really important to the participants is out in the open, so it can be addressed either in the next meeting or separately.

This is such a simple activity and it works equally well for engineers, artists, teachers, accountants, executives...you get the picture. Each person in the room has 30 seconds to share whatever he or she wants to share. There are no rules other than to be respectful. This is not the time to flame your fellow meeting participants.

Go around the room in order, politely cutting the speaker off at exactly 30 seconds. That includes the big boss – no letting him or her prattle on over the time limit. Believe me, after the first or second cut-off, everyone else will be succinct.

Go two rounds, so that each person has spoken for up to 60 seconds.

There is *no discussion whatsoever* during the exercise. It is strictly about speaking and listening, about getting in touch with each other's concerns and perspectives.

This is also an excellent meeting opener, although generally I use it as a closer.

Assuming your group is of a reasonable size, this should take all of 5 - 10 minutes, and it has an impressive impact on the team's sense of unity and cohesion. It also serves the function of providing air time for what is important to each person. You would be amazed at how far off your assumptions can be from someone else's. For virtual teams in particular, this is an essential opportunity for people on the phone to really be heard.

Selby Group Update: I Would Finally Recognize My Assistant if We Ran Into Each Other on the Street

I met my assistant, Janet Smith, for the first time last week. It was such a rush! Here we are at the fabulous Westin in downtown Seattle. We had just met and I said, "Let's take a picture now, while our hair isn't too windblown and we still have on lipstick." Ladies, can you relate?

The trip really drove home for me how important it is to bring together virtual teams at least once a year, and really more often. We were able to brainstorm ideas in a way that was just plain superior to working virtually. Janet is forever attending new training and developing new skills. Because I don't see her, I don't always know what new treasures she has discovered, and this was a great way to get caught up and begin leveraging more of her talents.

I combined business with pleasure, accompanying Kirk on a business trip. We had a great time wandering around Seattle on Sunday. There's the famous Pike's Market, of course, and incredible seafood everywhere, but what I really noticed is how alive the entire downtown is. It's truly a city where people live, not one in which they come in for work and then go home. What a great job Seattle has done in revitalizing its core.

Note to Traveling Light = Note to Janet = Note to Jen

Speaking of Janet, a few people have told me they were going to send a reply to this newsletter, until they saw that it went to "somebody named Janet." Yes, your replies do go to Janet, and she forwards them to me, while also screening for all the junk that would otherwise come in to my In box.

Did I Mention I'm Going to Spain?

On May 9 – 27, I'll be on vacation in Spain. Have you been there? Do you have any tips for me?

I'll be available for client consultations May 8 until 3:00, at which time I head to the airport and say, "*Adios! Hasta la vista!*"

All coaching client engagements are automatically extended three weeks, so you won't miss a thing.

If you want to meet with me May 5 – 8, please, please, please get on my calendar soon, because it's filling up fast. May 7 is completely booked. Other days have some availability.

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