

BEP 42 INT - Opening and Managing Meetings 1

Welcome back to businessenglishpod. This episode is the first in a two-part series on opening and managing meetings. In this part you will study how to open a meeting. In the second part you will learn how to manage the discussion.

The listening takes place in the Singapore offices of Daneline, an international shipping company. Martin, the GM, is chairing a meeting with Sandra, David and Sam to discuss a budget shortfall. Shortfall means their budget has fallen short of expectations. In other words, they don't have enough money, so they need to make some cuts. To chair a meeting is to lead the meeting. We can say that Martin is the chairperson. So in these two episodes on opening and managing meetings, you'll be learning language for chairing meetings.

Here are today's listening questions. You can check the website later this week for the answers:

- 1) What is the amount of the budget shortfall?

- 2) Why doesn't Sandra have a copy of the Agenda?

- 3) How many possible cuts are under discussion?

- 4) What is the first item on the agenda?

Vocabulary:

agenda: The list of items that you plan to cover in a meeting. We can "run through the agenda," or "receive a copy from the agenda." Also, you can "stick to the agenda," which means to follow it.

server: A computer that delivers information or software to other computers on a network. A server can "be down," which means to malfunction, or "be up" which means to be running normally.

gym memberships: A gym, short for gymnasium, is a place to do exercise in order to keep fit. A gym membership is a monthly or yearly card that let's you visit the gym without paying by the time.

demotivated: To lack morale or to feel that you have lost motivation.

potential: Basically this means "possible." A high-potential employee is someone who has great potential, i.e. great possibilities. In the dialogue, potential cuts are possible areas where the Daneline team can cut the budget.

outsourcing: This refers to another company, usually called a vendor, perform some service for you in exchange for money. By finding a vendor that can perform the service for less money than they themselves could do it, companies save money.

Dialog:

Martin: All right. Is everybody here? Great. I think we can get started. Well, good morning everyone. I'm sorry I had to call this meeting at such short notice. Did you all get a copy of the agenda?

Sandra: Sorry, Martin, do you have an extra copy?

Martin: Haven't checked your email this morning Sandra? Late again, huh?

Sandra: Oh, come on Martin. You know I'm never late. I think our server is down or something.

David: Here, you can look at mine.

Sandra: Thanks Dave.

Martin: After the meeting, make sure to call IT.

Sandra: Already have.

Martin: Good. Okay. As you know, the main objective of this meeting is to agree on ways to make up the budget shortfall of \$154,000 shortfall we're facing. I hate to say it, but it's belt tightening time.

Sam: Speaking of belt tightening, whatever we do we can't cut the free gym memberships. That would be totally demotivating, don't you think?

Martin: Let's get to that in a moment, Sam. Let me first go through the agenda. As you can see, we have a lot to cover. As you can see from the agenda, there are 10 areas we've identified for potential cuts. We'll run through them in order. Any questions before we start?

Sandra: No.

Martin: We'll break for lunch at 11:30, if that suits you.

Sam: That's fine.

Sandra: Fine by me.

Martin: Good. Okay, let's move straight to the first point on the agenda: Outsourcing cleaning. Sandra, would you please kick off?

Debrief:

There are many ways to open a meeting. It depends, obviously, on the type of meeting and the situation. But there are six key points that you will always need to consider when starting a meeting:

- 1) Getting everybody's attention.
- 2) Welcoming and thanking
- 3) Introducing any new colleagues
- 4) Explaining the objectives
- 5) Looking at the agenda, and...
- 6) Asking someone to start.

Let's look at how Martin handles each of these steps.

First getting attention. What does Martin say at the very beginning of the meeting?

All right. Is everybody here? Great. I think we can get started. Well, good morning everyone.

This language attracts everyone's attention and lets them know the meeting is starting. What else could Martin say?

- Okay. Let's get down to business.
- All right then. Can we get started?
- Okay folks. Let's get started, shall we?
- All right. Can I get everybody's attention? I think it's about time we get started.
- All right everybody. We need to get this show on the road.

The last example—"We need to get the show on the road"—is an informal idiom that means we need to start.

So Martin has gotten everybody's attention. What's next?

Well, good morning everyone. I'm sorry I had to call this meeting at such short notice. Did you all get a copy of the agenda?

To create a professional atmosphere, Martin is sure to welcome and thank everyone for attending. Practice some more ways to do this.

- Well, good afternoon everybody. It's good to see you all here. Did everyone get the agenda?
- Great! Thank you all for coming.
- Hello everyone! I'm glad to see you all here. I know it's a long way for some of you to come. I really appreciate your being on time and ready to work.

What is the reason that Sandra doesn't have a copy of the agenda? She's having some email problems. She says "I think our server is down or something." A server is a computer that delivers information or software to other computers on a network. But by saying "or something," Sandra shows that she doesn't really understand what's going on. This is a good example of useful vague or unspecific language. Let's practice some more examples of "or something."

A: Have you found the problem with the numbers?

B: We've been looking all afternoon, but still can't seem to find it. I think there's a problem with the spreadsheet or something.

A: The boss is looking really happy. He must have gotten a bonus.

B: Or something. I heard he has a new girlfriend. Maybe that's it.

So Martin has gotten everybody's attention, and welcomed and thanked everybody. What's next? If there are any new colleagues to introduce, he can do that now. For example, he could say:

- First of all, I'd like to introduce George from the Hong Kong office. Would you like to say a few words about yourself, George?
- Everybody say hello to Kerumi. She's visiting us from the Japan office.

In this case, however, there is no one new to introduce, so Martin just moves on to the next thing, explaining the objectives of the meeting.

As you know, the main objective of this meeting is to agree on ways to make up the budget shortfall of \$154,000 shortfall we're facing. I hate to say it, but it's belt tightening time.

"To tighten one's belt" is an idiom that means to reduce waste or expenditures. Expenditures means spending. So when Martin says "It's belt tightening time," he means it's time to cut spending.

How does he explain the objective of the meeting? He says, "As you know, the main objective of this meeting is to...." That is a good way to tell everybody the purpose of your meeting. What are some other ways?

- The reason we're meeting today is to work out ways to deal with the marketing challenges that we're facing.
- The primary purpose of this meeting will be to start a discussion on ways to cope with the huge increase in demand that we're seeing.
- The main problem that we're facing is how to manage our growth.
- The main thing I'd like to accomplish today is defining the key problem areas that we see with our current plan.

Notice the strong use of word partnerships or collocations in each of the examples you've just listened to: We *face*, *cope with*, *deal with* or *define* problems and challenges. By the way, "challenge" is a good word to use: It sounds more optimistic than "problem."

Now what happens? Sam, the operations manager, changes the subject doesn't he? He says, "Speaking of belt tightening, whatever we do we can't cut the free gym memberships. That would be totally demotivating, don't you think?" For definitions of gym memberships and demotivating, be sure to check the learner's notes.

When Sam changes the topic, Martin says "Let's get back to that in a moment Sam." This is a good expression for controlling the meeting. We'll be looking at ways of leaving and returning to the main topic in more detail during the second episode.

So far Martin has got everybody's attention, welcomed and thanked everybody, and explained the objectives. He still needs to look at the agenda, doesn't he? How does he do that?

Let me first go over the agenda. As you can see, we have a lot to cover. As you can see from the agenda, there are 10 areas we've identified for potential cuts. We'll run through them in order. Any questions before we start?

Potential means possible. Martin plans to "run through them in order," in other words, to deal with them one by one. Again, pay attention to the collocations and useful language in this example. "Go over the agenda," "have a lot to cover," "potential areas for cuts," and "run through something in order" are all useful expressions. Now, let's take a look at some other ways to look at the agenda.

- Let's take a quick look at the agenda. As you can see, it's broken down into five main parts.
- I've divided up the meeting today into three parts.
- I've prepared some figures to help us compare the two options. I'll distribute them now.

Next Martin talks about lunchtime plans. When you open a meeting, introducing the agenda is obviously a good place to talk about any other important rules or housekeeping details, such as when you will take a break, how long the meeting will last, what people should do if they have to take a phone call and so on.

After confirming when they'll break for lunch, the final thing Martin needs to do is to ask someone to start. He says

Good. Okay, let's move straight to the first point on the agenda: Outsourcing cleaning. Sandra, would you please kick off?

As you may recall from Business News 06, outsourcing means to have another company, usually called a vendor, perform some service for you. So outsourcing cleaning means that instead of having their own cleaning staff, Daneline will hire a cleaning company to do it for them.

"Please kick off" simply means "Please start." This is a common business idiom that comes from football, where "kick off" means to start the game. Later we will do a whole podcast just on sports idioms.

What are some other ways to kick off the first item on the agenda?

- Great. Well, we have a lot to cover, so let's get down to business. George, could you start by explaining the background on the first item?
- All right then. Let's start then, shall we? Katy, why don't you tell us what you've been thinking on the advertising issue.
- Right. Susanne, would you be so kind as to begin?

All right. So that just about covers this episode on opening a meeting. You've learned six important parts of opening a meeting: Getting attention, welcoming and thanking, introducing new colleagues, looking at the agenda and asking someone to start. You've also reviewed some common idioms, vocabulary and collocations for meetings and budget discussions.

That's all for today's show. Be sure to come back for the next episode in this two-part series on opening and managing meetings, where you'll learn ways to manage the discussion and keep them on track.

Thanks for listening!

Language Review Questions:

Exercise A

Put the tasks in a likely order.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Welcoming and thanking everybody. | 1. |
| b. Looking at the agenda. | 2. Introducing new colleagues |
| c. Explaining the objectives of the meeting | 3. |
| d. Getting everybody's attention. | 4. |
| e. Introducing new colleagues. | 5. |
| f. Asking someone to start the first item. | 6. |

Exercise B

Match the tasks above with the language below and fill in the blanks:

1. f Wendy, would you **kick** off the first item.
2. c The primary _____ of this meeting will be to start a discussion on ways to cope with this problem.
3. e Everybody say hello to Kerumi. She's _____ us from the Japan office.
4. d Okay everybody. Let's get _____ to business.
5. b I've _____ up the meeting today into three parts.
6. a Well, good afternoon everybody. It's _____ to see you all here.

Learning Tip: Write down and practice an introduction for a meeting that you chair or you've attended. In addition to the six tasks above, you may wish to consider any housekeeping points you need to cover (how long the meeting will last, whether you will be taking a break). Also consider any special points that need to be dealt with at meetings in your company (unfinished business from the last meeting, special announcements, etc.).

Useful Language:

Getting everyone's attention and starting the meeting:

- Okay. Let's get down to business.
- All right then. Can we get started?
- Okay folks. Let's get started, shall we?
- All right. Can I get everybody's attention? I think it's about time we get started.
- All right everybody. We need to get this show on the road.

To welcome and thank everyone for attending the meeting you can say:

- Well, good afternoon everybody. It's good to see you all here. Did everyone get the agenda?
- Great! Thank you all for coming.
- Hello everyone! I'm glad to see you all here. I know it's a long way for some of you to come. I really appreciate your being on time and ready to work.

Being vague using the phrase "or something":

A: Have you found the problem with the numbers?

B: We've been looking all afternoon, but still can't seem to find it. I think there's a problem with the spreadsheet or something.

A: The boss is looking really happy. He must have gotten a bonus.

B: Or something. I heard he has a new girlfriend. Maybe that's it.

Introducing new colleagues:

- First of all, I'd like to introduce George from the Hong Kong office. Would you like to say a few words about yourself, George?
- Everybody say hello to Kerumi. She's visiting us from the Japan office.

Explaining the purpose of the meeting:

- The reason we're meeting today is to work out ways to deal with the marketing challenges that we're facing.
- The primary purpose of this meeting will be to start a discussion on ways to cope with the huge increase in demand that we're seeing.
- The main problem that we're facing is how to manage our growth.
- The main thing I'd like to accomplish today is defining the key problem areas that we see with our current plan.

Referring to the agenda/organization of the meeting:

- Let's take a quick look at the agenda. As you can see, it's broken down into five main parts.
- I've divided up the meeting today into three parts.
- I've prepared some figures to help us compare the two options. I'll distribute them now.

To start discussing the first item on the agenda:

- Great. Well, we have a lot to cover, so let's get down to business. George, could you start by explaining the background on the first item?
- All right then. Let's start then, shall we? Katy, why don't you tell us what you've been thinking on the advertising issue.
- Right. Susanne, would you be so kind as to begin?

Answers

Listening Comprehension

- 1) \$154,000
- 2) She has some IT problems and didn't receive her email. She thinks the email server might be down.
- 3) areas have been identified for potential cuts.
- 4) Outsourcing cleaning of the office.

Language Review

Exercise A

- 1) Getting everybody's attention; 2) Welcoming and thanking everybody; 3) Introducing new colleagues; 4) Explaining the objectives of the meeting; 5) Looking at the agenda; 6) Asking somebody to start.

Exercise B

- 2) c, purpose, objective; 3) e, visiting us, coming to us from; 4) d, down; 5) b, divided; 6) a, great, good.