

## BEP 43 INT - Opening and Managing Meetings (Part 2)

Welcome back to businessenglishpod.com. This is the second in a two-part series on opening and managing meetings. In the first episode, we looked at how to open a meeting. In today's podcast we're going to cover how to manage the discussion.

Martin, the GM of Daneline Singapore, is discussing with his staff how to make up a budget shortfall. He has just asked Sandra to kick off the first item on the agenda - outsourcing the cleaning.

Before we hear the dialog, here are today's listening comprehension questions:

1) How much money can Daneline Singapore save by outsourcing cleaning?

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2) Does Sam like pizza?

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3) Does Dave agree with the strategy of outsourcing cleaning?

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4) How does Dave suggest dealing with the brochure redesign?

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### Vocabulary

**no-brainer:** Something that is so obvious that you don't even have to think about it to know that it's true. Used for example in the expression, "That's a no-brainer if you ask me."

**it's a little harsh:** Harsh means unkind or inconsiderate. You see it for example in the expressions harsh treatment or harsh realities. For example, "If you're going to succeed in this world you have to face the harsh realities of life."

**let people go:** This is a euphemism (a nice way) for saying to fire someone or to lay someone off.

**to prioritize sth.:** To make something a priority, that is give it high importance. You usually deal with first the things that you prioritize.

**vendor:** Another company that performs a service for your company or sells something to your company.



**Dialog:**

Martin: ...Sandra, would you please kick off?

Sandra: Well, this is a great way to cut a lot of fat. My figures show that we can save almost \$50,000 dollars with this one.

Sam: Can I just come in here? That reminds me, we really can't have pizza for lunch again. It's unhealthy.

Martin: Sorry, Sam, but I think this is a bit of a side-track. Let's try to keep to the agenda, ok? I want to get everyone out of here on time.

Sam: Of course.

Sandra: So as I was saying, outsourcing the cleaning can really save a lot of money. It's no-brainer if you ask me.

Martin: Uh huh. What do others think? Is there anything else we should consider?

Dave: Well, frankly, I think it's a little harsh to just let go people we've been working side by side with for years. And we have to think about how it will affect morale. (fade out)

Martin: Right, we seem to have dealt with the outsourcing issue. Now, let's move on to the brochures. We've budgeted \$68,500 to redesign and reprint all the sales and marketing brochures. Dave, this is your area of expertise. What do you think?

Dave: Well, obviously, if we're facing a shortfall, we need to make cuts. And this cut would be less painful than many of the others. But we really have to prioritize sales, because this is the bread and butter of our business. Perhaps we can consider a limited redesign?

Sam: I agree.

Sandra: I do to. You know, Dave, speaking of the brochure, you really consider using a different vendor for the brochures this time. I didn't think they did a good job on the last ones at all.

Dave: I'm with you 100%.

Martin: You may have a point there Sandra, but let's leave that for the regular team meeting on Thursday. We still have a lot to cover.

Sandra: Okay.

Martin: All right, can we go around the table to make sure everyone agrees? All those in favor of a limited redesign of the brochure? All those against?

## Debrief:

During the meeting, both Sam and Sandra attempt to change the topic. But Martin does a pretty good job of following the agenda, doesn't he? Let's study how Martin keeps the discussion on track. Along the way, we'll also look at some idioms and other useful language.

This first person to try to change the topic is Sam. Remember, Sandra is talking about how much money they can save by outsourcing cleaning.

Sandra: Well, this is a great way to cut a lot of fat. My figures show that we can save almost \$50,000 dollars with this one.

Sandra says that outsourcing is a great way "to cut a lot of fat." Similar to the phrase "to tighten one's belt," which we learned last time, "to cut a lot of fat" means to save a lot of money. This makes Sam think of food:

Sam: Can I just come in here? That reminds me, we really can't have pizza for lunch again. It's unhealthy.

It sounds as though Sam's stomach is more important to him than the budget discussions, doesn't it? Notice how Sam uses "that reminds me." This useful phrase links to what was just said to change the topic of discussion: What you said reminds me of something else.

So Sam has attempted to change the topic. How does Martin get him back on track?

Sorry, Sam, but I think this is a bit of a side-track. Let's try to keep to the agenda, ok? I want to get everyone out of here on time.

Martin uses the phrase "I think this is a bit of a side-track" to show that he feels the group has gone off the main topic on to an unimportant side issue. He is careful to emphasize the benefit to the group of keeping to the agenda by saying "I want to get everyone out of here on time," that is he wants everyone to be able to leave on time. Martin's skillful action guides the discussion back on track.

Returning to the topic gives Sandra a chance to finish what she was saying:

So as I was saying, outsourcing the cleaning can really save a lot of money. It's no-brainer if you ask me.

"So as I was saying," lets Sandra continue from where she was interrupted. How does she feel about outsourcing? She strongly supports it, saying that it's a "no-brainer." That means it's so obvious that you don't need a brain to figure it out.

Later on in the discussion, Sandra also tries to change the topic. Remember, Dave has proposed a limited or partial redesign of the brochure: He is against totally abandoning the brochure project because sales should be prioritized, meaning that

this should be given high importance. He says sales are the “bread and butter” of the business. This is an idiom that means something is very important to the business’ profit. Dave’s proposal reminds Sandra of a point she’d like to make. Let’s listen.

Dave: Perhaps we can consider a limited redesign?

Sam: I agree.

Sandra: I do to. You know, Dave, speaking of the brochure, you really should consider using a different vendor for the brochures this time.

Similar to Sam’s “That reminds me...,” Sandra uses “Speaking of the brochure” to change the topic. This kind of expression is particularly useful in informal discussions or when socializing and making small talk. We’ll be looking in more detail at ways to change the topic during later episodes on social English.

Now, let’s listen to how Martin gets the discussion back on track this time.

Martin: You may have a point there Sandra, but let’s leave that for the regular team meeting on Thursday. We still have a lot to cover.

In this expression and in Martin’s previous suggestion that “This is a bit of a side-track,” notice the strong journey metaphor. “Metaphor” means to describe something in terms of something else. In this case, we understand discussions in terms of a journey with a goal: The meeting participants are travelers who have to keep to or follow the agenda, which is the road.

With the journey metaphor in mind, let’s review the language for keeping the discussion on track:

- I can see what you’re saying, but let’s try to keep to the agenda.
- To save time, we need to stay on track. Let’s try not to get too far off topic.
- Let’s get back to that later. For now, I really want to stick to the agenda.
- That’s an interesting point, but let’s talk about that when we come to it. Can we get back to the main point?
- We’ve got a lot of ground to cover, so I suggest do our best to stay on track.

So far you’ve covered language for changing the topic and sticking to the agenda. Now let’s look at some language for widening the discussion to make sure you’ve heard different points of view. Remember earlier when Sandra says that outsourcing cleaning is a no-brainer? What does Martin say to bring other people into the discussion?

Martin: Uh huh. What do others think? Is there anything else we should consider?

“What do others think?” is an effective way to widen the discussion to include more people. What are some other phrases Martin could use?

- What other approaches are there to this problem? Does anybody have any ideas?
- How about other people? Any comments?
- Let's go around the table and get reactions to that idea. Who would like to begin?
- Are there any other ways to think about this?

Great. We've covered changing the topic, sticking to the agenda and widening the discussion. Now let's study how Martin moves from one point to the next in the meeting. What does he say after the team has finished talking about outsourcing?

Right, we seem to have dealt with the outsourcing issue. Now, let's move on to the brochures.

Similar to making a transition in a presentation, Martin signals that the last part has finished and the new part is beginning. Let's listen to some more language for doing just that.

- Good. I'd say that's about all for that topic. Now, let's turn to the issue of sales.
- Well, we've just about covered the San Francisco office. Let's continue by discussing Buenos Aires.
- Time is pressing. Let's leave that there and move on to the next point on the agenda, okay?

Take note of the professional way Martin asks Dave about his opinion on the next topic: He says, "Dave, this is your area of expertise. What do you think?" For a more complete review of other ways to ask for and give opinions, you can go back to BEP27. In addition, agreeing and disagreeing are covered in BEP28 and 29.

Great. There is one last topic to cover in today's episode: Checking everyone agrees in order to reach a decision. Listen to what Martin says at the end of the dialogue.

All right, can we go around the table to make sure everyone agrees? All those in favor of a limited redesign of the brochure? All those against?

"To go around the table" means to take a vote. You can either run through the participants one by one or, as Martin does, have them respond as a group by asking "All those in favor?" and "All those against?"

What are some other ways to check if everyone agrees?

- Can I get a quick show of hands. All those in favor?
- Let's take a vote. How many people are for this idea? Against? Thanks.
- Just quickly—is there anyone else that supports the strategy of reducing overhead. Please raise your hands.

That's about it for today's episode on controlling the discussion. This was the second in a two-part series on opening and managing meetings. Today you've learned how to return to the main point, change the topic, move on to the next point in the agenda, widen the discussion and check if everyone agrees. In addition, we've covered several useful idioms and looked at how the 'discussion-is-a-journey' metaphor is behind much of the language that we use to manage meetings.

That's all for today's show. Be sure to visit our website at [www.businessenglishpod.com](http://www.businessenglishpod.com) to have a look at the Study Notes for this and other episodes. We'll see you next time at **BUSINESSenglishpod**, where we'll have more great ways for you to keep your English learning on track.

### Language Review Questions

As you're learning English, thinking about metaphor can help your memory and contribute to your fluency, especially with idioms. For example, in the two episodes on opening and managing meetings, we have learned "to tighten one's belt" and "to cut the fat": In both these idioms "fat" refers to money that can be saved. In fact, language is full of metaphors. It seems we understand almost everything in terms of something else. Can you think of more? How about time is money—"We need to save time"—business is war—"They attacked our market position"—and so on. Are these the same in your native language? Many of them probably are, but you might find some that are not. This can be an interesting way to understand differences between cultures.

#### A. Discussion is a journey

#### B. Fat is extra costs

#### C. Business is war

#### D. Time is money

- 1) I don't think we're getting anywhere. Can we try another approach?
- 2) Within two years we hope to totally conquer this market
- 3) I hate to say it, but it's belt tightening time.
- 4) I feel like we're just going around in circles.
- 5) Our CEO is a real fat cat. He doesn't think twice about spending \$600 on a bottle of wine for dinner.
- 6) I'm sorry—I just can't spare the time at the moment.
- 7) For now I think the best thing we can do is get out of this market and keep our heads low in order to cut our losses.
- 8) Time is precious. Make sure you treasure every second.

#### A. Discussion is a journey

### Learning Tip:

Can you think of more common metaphors behind everyday idioms and expressions? Hints—*Up* is good, *down* is bad. *The body* is a container for emotions. *Arguments* are buildings.

### Useful Language

**To keep the discussion on track – thing about the references to travel and journeys in these examples:**

- I can see what you're saying, but let's try to keep to the agenda.
- To save time, we need to stay on track. Let's try not to get too far off topic.
- Let's get back to that later. For now, I really want to stick to the agenda.
- That's an interesting point, but let's talk about that when we come to it. Can we get back to the main point?
- We've got a lot of ground to cover, so I suggest do our best to stay on track.

**Widening the discussion to include more people:**

- What other approaches are there to this problem? Does anybody have any ideas?
- How about other people? Any comments?
- Let's go around the table and get reactions to that idea. Who would like to begin?
- Are there any other ways to think about this?

**Moving to a new topic:**

- Good. I'd say that's about all for that topic. Now, let's turn to the issue of sales.
- Well, we've just about covered the San Francisco office. Let's continue by discussing Buenos Aires.
- Time is pressing. Let's leave that there and move on to the next point on the agenda, okay?

**To check if everyone agrees:**

- Can I get a quick show of hands. All those in favor?
- Let's take a vote. How many people are for this idea? Against? Thanks.
- Just quickly—is there anyone else that supports the strategy of reducing overhead. Please raise your hands.

### Answers

#### Listening Comprehension

- 1) \$50,000
- 2) Apparently not. He says it's "unhealthy."
- 3) No, he thinks it's "harsh," that is not nice, to get rid of staff that have been working together with them for years. He also worries about what it will do to morale.
- 4) Dave suggests a compromise: limited redesign. We can assume that this strategy will both save some money and keep some of the redesign benefits.

#### Language Review

- 2) C 3) B 4) A 5) B 6) D 7) C 8) D.