



## Help! My Meetings Are out of Control!

*By Tammé Quinn Grzebyk*

A client submitted the following situation:

I lead a volunteer women's group at my church. The group's session begins with a business meeting, followed by desserts and chatting. While there is a true and important purpose to our organization, most of the women think these meetings are simply an opportunity for casual discussion. I can't get everyone to focus during our business meeting. In fact, while a guest speaker was presenting at a recent meeting, many members got up to eat as soon as the cakes were rolled out. This essentially cut the presenter's time short. It was embarrassing. How should I handle this group?

Our Response:

1. Ensure your group has a common mission and understands it fully. If this is an ongoing organization, there are probably goals that initially attracted these participants to the organization. Keep these highly visible.
2. If you do not currently utilize an agenda, start now. An agenda helps to set expectations. Your organization's mission can appear on the agenda, along with the topics to be covered. For everyone's clarity, include time limits for each topic. This will keep everyone on course.
3. Reorganize the order of the meeting's activities. While informal chatting may not be the primary goal, this piece may be important to the participants' perceptions of the meeting. The key is to conduct a session that meets the needs of the participants and the organization.
  - a. Start your meeting with the desserts and refreshments. This will give everyone a chance to mingle and catch up from the last meeting. And, in my experience, nothing can get in the way of a woman and her sweets!
  - b. Begin the business meeting after you have given participants the opportunity to fill up their coffee cups and dessert plates. Conduct the business meeting according to the times listed on the agenda.
  - c. When your business meeting concludes your participants can reconnect for more mingling should they so desire.
4. See our meeting column for more ideas.

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