

# Foreword

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**J**ust imagine: You are invited to join the school improvement committee this year. You learn from colleagues of the significant contributions the committee makes toward the success of the school. You hear that members take their responsibilities seriously. New members receive orientation and mentoring to ease their transition on to the committee. Members arrive at meetings fully prepared and on time. A detailed agenda addresses meeting goals, topics requiring attention, an approach for addressing each issue, and desired outcomes. Discussions are characterized by mutual respect for contributions, thoughtful listening, problem solving, as well as an attitude of openness for possibilities as opposed to barriers. Decisions are captured and next-step actions and responsibilities are assigned. Assignments are completed in time for the next meeting. Participants look forward to meetings and the good things that occur because of their actions. Some even agree, on occasion, to additional meetings. As a result, you view it as an honor to accept the invitation to serve and are eager to get to work.

On the other hand, the following scenario could just as likely occur. Imagine being appointed as a new member of a committee. The member you replace hands you a disheveled notebook with papers from meetings held in the last five years. You try to review as much as possible in preparation for the first meeting. The first meeting starts 15 minutes late; the chair explains that the copy machine broke as he was trying to print the agenda. Everyone is introduced and encouraged to contribute to his or her degree of comfort. A colleague suggests that you spend most of the time at this first meeting observing rather than talking. Heeding this advice, you observe as a series of disjointed conversations occur. While the chair tries to manage the group, it is apparent that whoever speaks the loudest gains the attention of the group. On occasion, a motion is made and seconded, and a decision is reached. Everyone celebrates as items on the agenda are checked off and they near adjournment. The committee members appear more interested in finishing the agenda than in the potential impact of their efforts.

Unfortunately, it is more likely that educators have experienced the second scenario rather than the first. Educators have good intentions when they convene meetings. They see a need to share leadership,

gather input, build ownership, accelerate action, and more. However, they generally make one of two mistakes. Either they assume good meetings just happen, or they fail to recognize the importance of good planning for meetings, to demonstrate respect for the time people contribute to the group. This book will help individuals who want to demonstrate that they value the time people give to meetings by applying effective meeting management skills. Educators will experience the first scenario I described above when leaders take advantage of the tremendous number of practical resources in this book.

Ann Delehant is a gifted meeting planner, consultant, facilitator, and coach. She has spent more than 25 years in education, helping educators reach their goals through meetings. She has experienced meetings through the lens of the participant, the convener, and the consultant. She has participated at local, state, and national levels and has served on appointed as well as elected committees. She knows firsthand what effective meetings can mean to a team, a school, or a school system, as well as the destructive potential of ineffective meetings.

In this book, Ann addresses five areas essential for ensuring successful meetings: planning a meeting, getting the group started, running the meeting, making decisions, and taking action. She has identified the critical issues effective leaders consider when convening people for the purpose of working together. For each issue, she offers an introduction and explanation. She brings the explanation to life through case studies and then provides ready-to-use tools and strategies to promote application.

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) is the largest nonprofit membership association committed to ensuring success for all students through staff development and school improvement. Our goal calls for all teachers in all schools to experience high-quality professional learning and teamwork as part of each workday. NSDC leaders are confident that educators learn when they collaborate meaningfully and that as a result, students benefit. Effective meetings are key to effective collaboration. School leaders can ensure effective meetings, collaboration, and teamwork when they apply the skills and resources provided in this book. Purposefully planned meetings have the potential to produce focused dialogue and new understandings and behaviors that can positively impact team members and their students. *Making Meetings Work: How to Get Started, Get Going, and Get It Done* in the hands of meeting leaders will advance the goal of high-quality learning and performance by all students and educators.

—Stephanie Hirsh  
Deputy Executive Director  
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