

# Meetings that Rock! Injecting Fun and Energy into Your Meetings

In my days as a senior government manager, I recall feeling as though meetings were a place where you went to get a bit of your soul sucked out of you.

So I'd suggest that perhaps we should all be setting a rather loftier goal for our meetings and events. And while we're reaching those loftier goals, why not turn the entire meeting experience into more of an inspiring experience adding more fun into the mix?

Injecting more fun into your meetings won't unto itself guarantee your meeting is a success, but it just might help draw more bums into the seats, keep folks awake and away from the swimming pools, and leave attendees feeling so good that they're already planning to attend next year's event before they've even hauled their bums from the seats.

Here are a few random ideas on how to up the fun factor in your next meeting.

## Set the Tone before the Meeting

- Make the agenda interesting, fun, and grabbing. I don't mean corny or goofy, but for goodness sakes inject some life into the actual meeting agenda copy! This is as much a marketing piece as anything else, so use captivating copy to attract attention and encourage all your presenters to use fun titles, regardless of how serious their presentation is (in fact, I'd suggest the more serious the topic, the more in need of a catchy, even self-deprecating title there is).
- Create a fun top-ten list of the reasons people shouldn't miss the meeting in addition to a fun top-ten list for why they should attend.
- Create a short, fun video (or series of videos) to post on your website that will serve as a teaser for your event. Ask your presenters for short promo videos to post. (As a keynoter, I've often provided teaser videos for clients and the feedback suggests that the videos have in fact influenced some attendees' decisions to attend the meeting.)
- Put together a fun video or at least a list of suggested things to see, do, eat and experience in the host city. Create a family-friendly version as well to encourage people to bring along their spouses and kids.
- Send people a fun "How to Survive the Meeting" tip sheet. Keep it fun, but include some actual nuggets that will help put attendees' minds at ease.



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- If you're going to have a theme, then use it or lose it. And don't go back to the same old cliché theme that sounds like it's been hacked off someone's corporate vision statement or that sounds like every other theme from the last ten years. Create a theme that's truly memorable, inspiring and fun. Something creative enough to actually serve as a useful catchphrase or that truly can be used as a guiding light when you make decisions about the event. Try using a thought-provoking or unusual question for your theme, then encourage all the presenters and attendees to arrive at the meeting with their best answer to the question. Having a question theme also creates an instant ice breaker for meeting attendees.
- Take advantage of all the social media outlets to plug your meeting in fun, creative ways and to highlight testimonials from past attendees.

### Kick Off

- Nothing say, "Hey this is going to be a fun meeting" quite like fun directional signs. (Conversely, nothing says, "I'm already hating this meeting because I can't even find the bloody registration table.")
- Nothing says, "Hey this is going to be a fun meeting" quite like fun name tags! Okay, so maybe fun name tags won't make or break your meeting, but it's something. Several companies offer wacky name tag add-ons with labels such as, "Plays Well with Others" or "Runs with Scissors." Or leave space for people to add a creative alter ego name based on a superhero OR leave space for people to add their alter ego fun job title that captures the real essence of what they do for a living and award a prize for the most creative title.

- Have all your meeting volunteers wearing fun t-shirts with your theme emblazoned on them. Consider different colored t-shirts, hats or scarves to identify different categories of volunteers.
- Hire a "town crier" to direct people to the registration table. The town crier can also be used to help herd folks back into the sessions after breaks throughout your event.
- Have a door prize draw right at the convention table to help set the tone.

### During the Meeting

- Look for opportunities to create rituals and traditions at your meetings. Traditions become part of your history, they help bond people together and give attendees something to look forward to year after year and something to reminisce about. It might be a ritual to kick off the entire meeting, to end the meeting, to start or end each day, a ritual to introduce the new incoming president, or a ritual that welcomes the new attendees in a fun way. (One of my clients had all their newest members serve coffee to the rest of the attendees on the first breakfast while wearing bright red vests.)
- Invite any meeting attendees or volunteers who have a talent of some sort to busk during the coffee and meals breaks. You can also use it as a fundraising mechanism to raise money for your charity of choice.
- Include a fun trivia list or fun questionnaire on each table. Use a different one each half day.
- There's a reason Billy Crystal is back at the Oscars. A great emcee can keep the energy, theme and fun flowing throughout the meeting.
- Award prizes for the furthest away attendee and the closest attendee; the best dressed; the person whose appearance most closely ties into your theme; the attendee with the best idea on how to improve next year's meeting...



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- Award a “Best Audience” prize to the table that demonstrates the best audience behaviour.
- Shoot short, fun “attendee in the hall” videos to capture their impromptu thoughts on the meeting and then intersperse the clips throughout the meeting.
- Award a prize for whoever can provide the group with the fastest and most accurate summary of the meeting on the closing day.
- Let attendees know what wacky holiday (“Talk Like a Pirate Day” – September 19; “Answer Your Cat’s Question Day,” January 22) it is each day of your meeting.
- Have a different fun theme day for each day of the event (day 1 could be “High Five” day, day 2, “Talk in the Third Person, day” day 3 “Ask a Strange Question” day.)
- Take a cue from the folks at “Dance Your PhD”, wherein PhD candidates actually dance their PhD, and encourage presenters to do a 30-second dance summarizing their presentation.
- Hold a “This Meeting’s Got Talent” evening or morning where people can showcase unusual talents.
- Match different fun theme songs to different presenters.
- Hold a meeting scavenger hunt over the course of the meeting that links to your theme.
- Hold a “get to know you” attendee scavenger hunt where people must find different attendees who match unusual characteristics/traits/hobbies as listed on the sheet.
- Have some greeters at each entrance. Hey, if it works for Wal-Mart...
- Do a “word of the day” drinking game – wherein whenever the emcee (or presenters if they are game) says a certain word everyone in the audience takes an exaggerated sip from their water/coffee/tea.
- Put an “idea bulletin board,” “humor board,” or “photo board” up in a prominent location.
- Have each presenter answer a series of quirky questions before each presentation (a la James Lipton from “Insider the Actors Studio”).
- Hire caricaturists to draw cartoon sketches of the presenters, attendees and even to capture a summary of the presentations in a fun way.
- Put a headlamp on each table, so that if anyone wants to ask a question of a presenter, they must don the headlamp and turn on the light to indicate they wish to ask a question.

### After the Meeting

- A fun post-event video on the web site can help remind attendees of the value they received from the event and prime the interest for next year’s event.
- Create an opportunity for attendees to easily upload video testimonials to your website, encouraging people to keep them short, benefit-focused and fun.
- Send out a humorous “top-10 things we hoped you learned from the meeting list” that intersperse funny highlights with some serious gems from the event.

As you can appreciate there truly is an endless number of ways to inject a bit, or a lot, of fun into your meetings. Depending on the size and nature of your meeting some of these ideas may be too “out there” for your next event, but with a little imagination and input from meeting attendees there are countless simple things any meeting organizers can do to up the fun factor.

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# Twenty-four Awesome Meeting Ideas to Add Some Fun, Creativity, and Energy into Your Meetings

1. Officially start your meetings 10 minutes early to include a 10-minute buffer period and socializing time that gives participants a chance to grab a coffee, say a few hellos, share a laugh, and still start the official part of the meeting on time.
2. Play the increasingly popular dinner game of "Phone Stacking," wherein everyone puts their electronic gadgets in a basket and whoever is the first to check theirs, or who owns the first one that goes off, has to put \$10.00 into your social committee fund, or pay for the donuts, or dance an Irish jig, or sing a Celine Dion song...
3. Kickoff your meeting with a fun ritual or icebreaker, even something as simple as a funny "thought of the day" or announcing whatever wacky theme day it happens to be, or opening with a strange question ("What celebrity would be of most beneficial to our organization and why?") can help set the right tone.
4. Assign a Meeting Ref on a rotating basis, who plays the role of tracking any meeting violations and who keeps things moving smoothly along!
5. Leave two blank chairs, or better still, get some inflatable dummies or mannequins, to represent your ideal customer and your ideal employee, as a constant reminder to ask what they might be thinking and to view issues from their perspective. Use them as your voices of conscience.
6. Clarify at the onset what is the goal or purpose of the meeting to remind people about why their presence matters and what is expected of everyone.
7. Introduce everyone in a fun way. Have a standing ovation for everyone who comes into the meeting room or have everyone share their alter ego name derived from the formula: "Your first pet's name + the name of the street you first lived on."
8. Play a drinking game. Choose 1-3 words or phrases that you are trying to reduce the use of in your workplace and every time anyone uses one of those words or phrases everyone must take a loud exaggerated sip from their coffee, tea, or water.
9. Break up into small groups. As soon as your meeting size gets bigger than just five people, some attendees will have a tendency to withdraw from conversations and brainstorming, especially around contentious issues. So even in smaller meetings, breaking up the group into even smaller discussion groups of three people and then reconvening increases the likelihood that all voices will be heard.
10. Add a "What if..." component to your agenda to dedicate time to just thinking about possibilities rather than always focusing on problems or issues.
11. Have a "Rumour mill" portion for people to bring up issues that might not be on everyone's radar.
12. Include a "What haven't we talked about" section in your agenda.
13. Include a "Show and Tell" portion in which anyone can share something new or innovative on which they are working.
14. For longer meetings, include a "humor break" half way through, wherein participants go around the table and tell a funny quick work-related story, joke, or quote.



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15. Have a "Whine and cheese" section in your meeting where you serve cheese and allow people to whine about something that's not working at work in an exaggerated way, with the promise being that this is the only time they get to whine about it, otherwise the whine has to stay corked!
16. Include a "Meet \_\_\_\_\_" section to introduce a new employee or a new client to the group.
17. Bring food, especially fun food that will generate conversation. Try popcorn to go with a video screening, ethnic food to celebrate your team's diversity, or desserts to talk about how to put the icing on the cake for your customers. Beryl Health Centers has a Dessert Ambassador in its organization who brings a different tasty dessert treat to each meeting once a month.
18. Try a little stand up. No, not comedy. Have everyone stand for the meeting. You'd be amazed at how much quicker things move along and how the dynamics will change.
19. Use fun door prizes to encourage positive meeting behaviors, fun penalties to discourage negative meeting behaviours.
20. Have everyone wear a removable name tag that includes something other than their name. Perhaps how they are feeling on a scale of 1-10, a word that best describes their mood, the name of their first pet, or a strange question.
21. Use the sports stadium "wave" to inject some energy half way through a meeting.
22. Introduce a surprise part way through, such as arrange for a masseuse team to offer shoulder massages halfway through a meeting.
23. Recap the meeting, summarizing the salient points and reminding everyone of the decisions that were made and who's doing what by when. Be specific and build momentum!
24. End on a high note with a fun ritual or tradition that encourages everyone to leave with a smile on their face, celebrating the positive things that have happened, and focused on the need to build momentum toward the next meeting.



## Fun Meeting Icebreakers to Set the Mood

It's important that you set the right tone at the start of your meetings, and often the tone that is most effective is a light-hearted one.

Opening meetings in a fun way puts attendees at ease, helps focus participants in the moment, encourages more open communication, sparks creative thinking, and even builds trust. Moreover, starting meetings on a fun note can become a tradition to which meeting participants look forward, so that over time people actually show up to your meetings on time because they don't want to miss the opening!

**Here are 52+ icebreakers – enough for one meeting a week – some fun, some silly, some a bit more serious, that might help your team start your meetings on the right note:**

1. Assign everyone an alter ego name for the meeting based on this simple formula:  
Your alter ego name is: "Your First Pet's Name as a Child" (or a neighbor's/relative's pet) + "Your Mother's Maiden Name = Your New Name. Go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves using their alter ego name, and/or have everyone write their newfound names on their "Hello, My Name is...." nametags.
  2. Same as above, only using everyone's "Rock Star" name as generated at the website: [www.rockstarname.com](http://www.rockstarname.com)
  3. Same as above, only using everyone's "Country Western" name as generated at the website: [www.countrystarname.com](http://www.countrystarname.com)
  4. Same as above, but using everyone's "Pro Wrestling" pseudonym as generated at the website: [www.wrestlingname.com](http://www.wrestlingname.com)
  5. Same as above, but using everyone's anagram-generated name, as created at the website: [www.wordplays.com/anagrams](http://www.wordplays.com/anagrams)
  6. Same as above, but use everyone's "poet's name" as generated at the website: [www.wordchowder.com/Poetnamem.html](http://www.wordchowder.com/Poetnamem.html)
  7. Pull out a coin and read the date, then have everyone talk briefly about their top memory of that year and where they were and what they were doing that year.
8. Open with a short fun video, such as the Fun dancers video on the home page of [www.HumoratWork.com](http://www.HumoratWork.com)
9. Ask everyone an unusual, fun, or thought-provoking work-related question. Starting the meeting with this tradition not only can be fun, it encourages everyone to participate and you can learn some interesting



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things not only about your colleagues, but about your organization that might help you succeed. For a list of potential questions, you can purchase the e-book “Inspiring Questions for Inspiring Workplaces” at <http://store.mikekerr.com/e-books/inspiring-questions-for-inspiring-workplaces/>

### Here’s a few possible questions to try out:

- What celebrity would help our organization the most and why?
- What was the worst job you had, and what specifically made it so bad?
- What TV show or movie title best describes your workplace culture?
- If you could change one policy or rule in your workplace, what would you change and why?
- If you could change your job title to better reflect your role and responsibilities, what would you call yourself?
- What’s your most annoying workplace buzzword or jargon phrase?
- What’s one thing we could do to make the workplace more fun?
- What’s one thing we ought to be doing for our customers that we’re currently not doing?
- What’s something we need to do more to foster more ideas in the workplace?
- Who’s the most creative person you know and what makes them so creative?

**10.** Go around the room and ask everyone to answer an unusual or fun personal question... something that allows participants the chance to get to know each other at a personal level. This needn’t take long; some of the questions may only require very succinct, top-of-mind answers.

- What’s the best movie you’ve seen recently?
- What’s your favorite TV sitcom of all time?
- What’s the worst job you ever had?
- What’s the number one place you want to visit in the world?
- If you won the lottery tomorrow, what would you do?
- If you could play a musical instrument you currently don’t play, what would it be?
- What other language would you most like to speak fluently?
- What was your very first job?
- What is your favorite season?
- What would your “last meal” request be?
- What’s the funniest thing that has happened to you recently?
- What’s the funniest thing someone has said to you recently?

**11.** Recognize whatever fun, offbeat theme day or holidays it happens to be, such as “Talk like a Pirate Day” or “Blame Someone Else Day.” You can simply announce the day’s theme at the start of the meeting and/or post it on a whiteboard or flip chart for everyone to see. For a listing of offbeat theme days, visit [www.humoratwork.com](http://www.humoratwork.com) and type “wacky theme days” into the search box to find a list, sorted by month.



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12. Recognize someone on the team by publicly sharing and praising a positive piece of news about them.
13. Share a good news story that has happened in your organization or industry.
14. Many organizations with a strong safety culture open their meetings with a "safety moment," so try a spin on this by opening with a "values moment," where you talk about one of your organization's core values, relate a story that demonstrates how someone lived the value out loud or go around the room and have everyone talk about something they've done recently that reflected that core value.
15. Share a fun fact related to your business – some weird statistic, strange historical fact, or offbeat piece of trivia.
16. Share a fun quote of the day with the team – something funny or thought-provoking, or better still, both! There are hundreds of great sites on the web for quotes, and you also can find great quotes in the archived issues of the Humor at Work e-newsletter at: [http://archive.aweber.com/humor\\_at\\_work](http://archive.aweber.com/humor_at_work)
17. Open the meeting with a "Meet \_\_\_\_\_" segment, where you introduce someone new to your organization complete with some fun, personal facts about the individual.
18. Loosen people up and get the laughter flowing with three minutes of the "energy ball": a theater improv warm up exercise wherein everyone stands up and you pass one imaginary, invisible ball of energy back and forth to each other. Works best if you clap it out to the person you want to throw it, and they then catch it with a clapping motion. Sounds insanely flakey, but it never fails to get people laughing and to wake everyone up!
19. Stupid human tricks: yes, open with a segment of stupid human tricks wherein you encourage anyone to step forward with any weird skill or talent they possess, be it ventriloquism, touching their tongue to their nose, wiggling their ears or simply arching one eyebrow in dramatic, "Spock-like" fashion. Award a small prize for the best stupid human trick as voted on by the meeting participants.
20. Read out a rave review customer letter or raving comment by a customer.
21. Order customized fortune cookies with work-related quotes, ideas, thoughts or trivia inside them, and have each participant read out his/her particular quote. (Google "customer fortune cookies" to find a supplier near you.)
22. Brainstorm something fun or silly to fire up the creative juices, focus people in the present, and to remind participants of the basic rules of a good brainstorming exercise (no blocking, listen to each other, leap frog off each other's ideas, go for quantity not quality). Potential topics include: come up with the most number of uses for a paper clip, create a new superhero that reflects your best business practices, come up with 10 alternative uses for a stapler, 20 ways creatively to add value to your customer service experience, or alternative names for your meeting room...
23. Go around the room and have everyone say how they are doing on a scale of 1-10. Option b, have them not only say their number, but why they chose the number they did.

**24.** Have participants draw a picture on the whiteboard or a flip chart that best represents what is on the top of their mind right now.





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25. Have a five-minute trivia challenge game with questions related to your industry or organization. This could easily become a tradition at every meeting.
26. Have a five-minute trivia game NOT related to your business.
27. Leave out a pile of random photos torn out of magazines and have people pick up a photo that best describes where they are emotionally/mentally at work right now and explain why.
28. Open with a book review of a work-related book that someone read. This could become a rotating tradition where someone new each meeting is called upon to provide a synopsis and review of a book.
29. "In the News": Share some interesting news articles or opinion pieces from the news that relate to your industry.
30. Open with the "stress-busting tip" of the day. This could become a tradition along the lines of the "safety moment" but instead focusing in on stress management and overall wellness topics. The tips could run the gamut from how to get a better night's sleep to nutrition tips; from how to prioritize your workload effectively to how to tap into your sense of humor.
31. Open with the joke of the day. Keep it clean, and of course stay away from any sexual, ethnic, religious, or political humor.
32. Have participants pair off and give them five minutes to come up with six things they have in common with each other, other than the totally obvious (so, no "we're both mammals" allowed).

**33.** Ask everyone or anyone to share the funniest work-related anecdote that has happened to them since the last time you met.

34. Give everyone funny name tags, courtesy of the folks at Pc/Nametag ([www.pcnametag.com/product-FUN\\_TITLES\\_RIBBON\\_PACK-110.aspx](http://www.pcnametag.com/product-FUN_TITLES_RIBBON_PACK-110.aspx))

They've got a collection of fun name tag add-ons that include, to name just a few,: Runs With Scissors, Queen Bee, Big Cheese, BORED Member, Plays Well With Others, and My Ribbon is Better Than Your Ribbon.

35. Introduce the special guests attending your meeting in spirit only: To add some fun to your meetings and to help your team brainstorm from some different perspectives, try creating a few stock, exaggerated imaginary characters who attend all your meetings. Make one an imaginary superhero - someone who represents your company values in an outrageously exaggerated way. When you brainstorm or debate a new decision, you then get to ask, "What would Super Dave do?" (Of course, I'm confident you'll come up with a wittier, more descriptive name than Super Dave.)

Then create a character who represents your most ideal customer, and a character who represents your most powerful nemesis (perhaps your main competitor), after all, every great superhero requires a super villain! Flesh out their attributes, then use the characters as points of reference in all your planning, brainstorming, and communication efforts. Remember, the entire planet is depending on you!



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36. Open each meeting with a Top 10 list. It could be funny or merely interesting facts or tidbits about your industry. A simple one to try is a "Top-10 Reasons We're Having This Meeting," then create a list that intertwines the humorous with some serious reminders as to why the meeting is important.
37. Announce the "meeting rules of the road," but since the idea is to set a positive tone make sure they are fun! You might consider announcing, for example, some fun penalties for meeting infractions, such as: Whoever is caught texting or answering a cell phone will have to dance an Irish jig or pay a dollar into the social fund committee.
38. Give out a door prize to whoever arrived the earliest at the meeting, whoever had to travel the farthest, and whoever has the best joke, thought, or quote of the day.
39. Announce a "word of the day" for your meeting. Define what the word means, use it in a sentence, and then encourage people to weave it into as many conversations as they can.
40. Announce the "weasel word" of the day for the meeting: a word or phrase that you are trying NOT to use in your workplace. Fine people a dollar every time they use it in the meeting.
41. Open the meeting with a wacky sound that becomes your official "start of the meeting kickoff" signal: a gong, kazoo, or bagpipes would all work fabulously. Except for the bagpipes.
42. Thank everyone for attending the meeting in a fun way.
43. Have each participant pull a different question, quote, thought of the day or interesting fact from a bowl and read it to the group.
44. Rather than have everyone wear name tags, have everyone write down a word on their name tag that reflects their energy level.
45. Give everyone a standing ovation as they enter the meeting room. Yes, you'll begin with only one person giving a standing ovation to one or two people perhaps, but that makes it even more fun!
46. Introduce any guests at your meeting, but be sure to include some fun, personal facts about them (okay, not too personal, the object isn't to embarrass them, but to simply make them feel welcome and for the rest of the participants to get to know them a little better).
47. Have each person around the table take a moment to thank someone, as a way of reminding people how important it is to regularly praise employees in your organization. The person doesn't necessarily have to be present at the meeting, it could be a simple public recognition of someone that serves also as a reminder than after the meeting everyone present at the meeting should take the time to acknowledge the individual in person.
48. Spend a minute or two at the start of your meeting, as an accounting firm in the U.S. does, blowing bubbles at each other. An effective, albeit a tad silly, way to help people relax and have a few laughs.
49. Spend a few minutes practicing the fine art of scarf juggling, another great way to generate a few laughs and to focus participants in the moment. Plus, it's much safer than starting out juggling chainsaws.



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**50.** Have everyone stand, place their hands on their hearts, and recite a pledge for how they will behave during the meeting.

51. Have everyone stand and do the “fun dance” for one minute. For instructions, watch the video posted here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX9IF8WyCKM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX9IF8WyCKM)
52. Acknowledge any birthdays, anniversary dates, or special occasions happening in any of the meeting participants’ lives.
53. Open with an interesting “This Day in History” fact (Google “this day in history” to find examples). Bonus points if you find a few that are not only interesting but also relevant to your industry.
54. Another alternative name generator to try: The Honey Boo Boo Name Generator. To generate everyone’s Honey Boo Boo southern nickname, Google Honey Boo Boo Name Generator.
55. Yet another alternative name generator: Your Hobbit Alter Ego Name. Google Hobbit Alter Ego Name Generator.
56. Have each participant come up with as many anagrams for their name as possible in five minutes. Could be a team or individual competition. OR, Google anagram name generator to find a site that does it for you, and choose everyone’s funniest alter ego name.
57. Have each person stand and spell their name using only the movement of their hips.
58. Another alter ego name generator, this one for your Super Villain alter ego name: [www.chimpage.com/supervillain.html](http://www.chimpage.com/supervillain.html)
59. Rather than have everyone wear name tags with their names of them, have everyone wear a tag with a word on it that best describes their work situation since you last met.
60. Open with the question: What’s one thing you have done since the last meeting of which you are most proud?
61. Open with the question: What’s one thing each member around the table does that makes the team better?
62. Have a different name tag theme each meeting. One meeting everyone wears a name tag listing their birth city; another meeting they list their favorite animal; another their favorite song. It’s a simple way to build connections and generate conversations.

