



## Thoughtcatcher

Freeing the Prisoners of Boring, Unproductive Presentations and Training

### How to Facilitate Breakfast Meetings without Indigestion or Starvation

Breakfast meetings are popularly thought of as ways to get people productive in otherwise wasted times of the day. Sadly they often are "sofa-bed meetings".

Like most sofa-beds, which tend to be lousy sofas and even worse beds, breakfast meetings are often not very productive and pretty unsatisfying as breakfast.

The aspiration is often to make the process informal and interactive by having the breakfast but it too often falls back into the same old pattern of one persons monologue with a well-intentioned audience struggling to listen over the clatter of knives and forks.

The reasons for this include

- Unrealistic time-scales. Many people are not mentally alert at 7am and struggle to be both on time and awake.
- Many people feel uncomfortable about eating and asking for the fruit platter to be passed while somebody out the front is trying to communicate with them.
- When people eat in groups they are more accustomed to interact with those at their table than eat as an audience member.
- It is hard to ask a question with a croissant in your mouth.



So the challenge becomes to facilitate a process whereby people get to eat, interact, ask questions, discuss and listen to someone who might enlighten or facilitate.

How to make even a large gathering intimate, engaging and a conversational dialogue rather than a one-way monologue that relies purely on the listening skills of the audience and their ability to rise above the din of the

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fruit-choppers and croissant-munchers surrounding them.

Below is an overview that will help achieve these things in almost any breakfast setting and have participants come away feeling satisfied and valued. This particular meeting is with a Board but it will work with any speaker and enable them to ensure that what they talk about is participant-centred, gets listened to and everyone leaves well-fed in every sense.

### **Overview**

The typical breakfast meeting runs from 7am to 8.30am.

The aim is usually to give a large number of attendees seated banquet style at tables of 8, the opportunity to interact with, gather information from and ask questions of Board members or speakers, with a view to building rapport, shared knowledge and experience. Given that sharing a meal should add to the conviviality of the process, it is important that sufficient time be allocated to just eating and chatting without a constant input from speakers at the front of the room.

Therefore it is estimated that about 45 minutes is required for arrival, settling-in and eating with the remaining 45 minutes spent in a more structured question and answer session.



We recommend that as people are served breakfast a brief welcome includes setting up the opportunity for attendees to write any questions they may have on post-it notes provided at their table. About 5 minutes later they should be asked to discuss their questions and choose one "table" question that they will then post on a central board. This process should take around 15 minutes. While everyone is still eating and as questions are posted, the speaker/s can look at them to decide who is best positioned to answer which questions or how to work the answers into their presentation.

At 7.45am the more structured answering of posted questions can begin with further discussion from the floor as required. Alternatively if there is a speaker with a pre-prepared presentation, they can work their answers to the most common questions into their prepared presentation.



As there are likely to be 20 or more questions, it may be useful for Board members to undertake to answer any remaining questions during the course of the conference and/or in follow-up discussions.

