

# All-Hands Meetings

Get everyone aligned & moving toward the same goals



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**One of the best ways to get everyone in your organization moving towards the same goals is to conduct regularly scheduled all-hands meetings.**

**These forums let your leadership team bring everyone up to speed on what's happening and why.**

**All-hands meetings are without a doubt one of the most powerful tools you can employ to foster strong communications within your organization, and they give you the biggest returns on the time invested. With benefits ranging from boosting productivity to streamlining processes, the investment in an all-hands meetings certainly will pay off. All hands meetings are also a critical component in establishing your corporate culture, which is a key element to a company's success.**

## 1. Key Benefits of All-Hands Meetings

Holding regular all-hands meetings creates a virtuous cycle of open communications. This develops an exciting and enduring corporate culture, which in turn fosters an enthusiastic team, which in turn increases customer loyalty and makes for a profitable business.

Here are five benefits your business can realize by investing in regular all-hands meetings:

### **Aligning everyone's efforts with the company goals**

All-hands meetings are the perfect channel for communicating your company's overall strategy and key tactics for the coming period. They also give each department the opportunity to present how their contributions will play a crucial role in reaching the company's objectives. This is invaluable because it gives employees an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of where they fit and how they depend on each other to achieve the overall corporate goals.

### **Building and reinforcing the company culture**

Getting everybody in your company together on a regular basis is an unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate your company culture. All-hands meetings are particularly effective for getting new hires introduced to company philosophy and aligned with the way things are done.

59% of US employees don't feel that they know what their company stands for, or what makes its brand different from competitors' brands.

### Unifying distributed organizations

Many companies have offices and employees distributed across the country, or around the world. Satellite offices may easily feel detached from the company's headquarters, along with the decisions being made there. Virtual workers with home offices may not see colleagues often, and if they do it is typically limited to just their closest team members. An all-hands meeting creates a feeling of togetherness in your employees, building shared goals, and fostering collaboration.

### Fostering a collaborative team environment

All-hands meetings should combine work with fun, both providing useful work-related information as well as including fun, team building activities. Scheduling a social event immediately following the all-hands meeting is one way to accomplish this. Another option is to wrap up the all-hands meeting itself with a team building activity. An important function of all-hands meetings is to break down walls between departments, facilitating cross-team communication that improves the productivity of the entire company. Employees who have a shared experience together at an all-hands meeting have more communication channels to tap into when completing their tasks.

The biggest causes for conflicts at enterprises are misalignment and miscommunication.

## 2. Best Practices for All-Hands Meetings

Don't leave the planning of your all-hands meeting to chance. By just slapping something together at the last minute, or winging it, you are exemplifying a lack of professionalism that you would not want your employees to mimic. Instead, invest the time in advance to make sure you deliver value for every attendee. You want to communicate the right message, and being unprepared is not it. Instead, be prepared, be focused, be passionate, and bring your smile.

### Decide how often you should conduct all-hands meetings

The faster your company is growing, the more frequently you should have all-hands meetings. Because there will be more changes and more adjustments of direction, you'll have more information to share with your employees. Companies in growth mode are likely to have all-hands meetings either biweekly or once a month, while more established companies might do their all-hands meeting quarterly, or even annually. However, if you have a great message for your team, that will get them energized and excited about the direction of the company, and motivated to perform their best, you should not hesitate to schedule all-hands meetings more often.

### Identify the best time and day for your all-hands meeting

Depending on the nature of your organization, there might be some weekdays that are strategically more suited for all-hands meetings than others. If your company adheres to regular Monday to Friday office hours, you should consider scheduling your all-hands meeting at the start of the week, e.g. Monday morning at 10am. Aim to motivate and energize participants, so they get back to their work inspired. An equally viable option is to schedule your all-hands meeting at the end of the week, e.g. Friday afternoon at 3pm. This lets the participants head into the weekend informed about what's going on in the company, and if you are bringing them good news, they'll leave on a high.

### Don't drag it out

Depending on how often you schedule your all-hands meetings, a 30 to 60 minute timeframe should work well. Don't turn your all-hands meeting into a marathon your employees are dreading to attend. If feasible, it's a good idea to schedule a social gathering following the all-hands meeting. Provide food and fun, and let your employees enjoy themselves, network, and build relationships.

### What is best, face-to-face or virtual all-hands meetings?

All-hands meetings are often the only time all employees are gathered together at the same time. This should ideally be face-to-face, but this is less and less feasible in today's distributed organizations. If all employees are in the same office location, this is easy. Just find a space large enough to accommodate everyone, and use that as your regular all-hands meeting location. However, if your organization is distributed across multiple locations, you have to make sure you set up a good video and audio conferencing system so everyone can participate. To make everyone feel included, have participants from your remote offices provide updates during the all-hands as well.

## USE CASE: Build Trust & Transparency with Live Q&A

A global Canadian technology company incorporates a meeting collaboration platform, like MeetingSift, to let their employees have the opportunity to submit questions to their executive team live, during the all-hands meeting. The executive team respond to these questions on-the-spot during the Q&A section of the all-hands meeting. This practice generates a huge volume and scope of questions, so those questions that cannot be addressed during the all-hands meeting can later be answered in other communication channels, like the monthly newsletter or on the company intranet.

Having the opportunity to ask their executives direct questions, and getting them answered immediately, makes the employees feel a closer connection to their management team. While the issues addressed by the questions identifies which subject areas need more clarification and deeper communication with employees.

### Identify one key message

What is the one single thing you want people to remember, and take action on, as a result of this particular all-hands meeting? There are probably many important items that you need to communicate to the members of your organization. However, if you try to cover all of them, or even just a handful, people are going to leave with different messages and focus. Instead, use this valuable time, when you have everyone's attention, to focus on one single message. What is the most important goal the organization should steer towards in the days and weeks to come?

As you identify what to focus on in your next all-hands meeting, keep in mind the other all-hands meetings you are likely to hold over the next year. What would be your number one message in each of those? You might already have some ideas for topics, and in which order they would be best presented. By providing a key message for each all-hands meeting you will help your team focus and aim in the same direction, contributing to the company's success.

### Provide a call to action

Support your key message with some examples of actions the participants at your all-hands meeting can perform to contribute towards this particular goal. Help them understand that doing these actions is directly related to reaching organizational goals, increasing the company's success, and ultimately benefitting them as individuals. This is where you get to display leadership, by setting the course and connecting what employees are doing every day with the purpose, direction, and success of the company. What you say matters. Take the time to make it great.

### Plan all-hands meetings like you plan events

Make an effort to plan out your all-hands meeting in detail. Start with your main objective, the one key message, and work backwards. Consider how you can engage participants and get them to interact, making

## **USE CASE:** Innovate by Crowdsourcing your Employees

A global US technology company is keeping the pipeline of innovation going by tapping its employees and letting ideas percolate up. Their all-hands meetings are one of many channels for employees to submit new ideas and suggestions for improvements. This can easily be done via digital brainstorming, using a collaborative meeting platform like MeetingSift, where participants use their smartphones to submit their input and feedback. The ideas are visualized live in front of the crowd, enhancing the engagement.

Employees look for meaning in their work, and they want to have some ability to shape their environment. By engaging employees in idea generation you can cultivate a creative and passionate workforce that holds the key to the company's innovation. Learning how to better attract and manage innovators and foster engagement ultimately leads to success.

it fun and exciting. Find out how you can make the all-hands meeting a high priority for your employees, something they don't want to miss. Sure, you can make them come, but a stick approach will only work as short-term motivation, while a carrot strategy will produce long and lasting results. If possible, follow the all-hands meeting with a social gathering, because people are abuzz about what we've just talked about, and they want to know more and they want to contribute—which is exactly what you want in your team.

### **Assign a dedicated Meeting Leader**

As with any meeting, the all-hands meeting needs a meeting leader in charge of communicating with presenters, rounding up items for the agenda, start and end on time, and keep things on track. One of the meeting leader's most important responsibilities is to politely ask people to wrap up, and ask people to continue off-topic discussions outside the all-hands meeting. The CEO is generally not the best person to lead all-hands meetings. Instead this task should be delegated to another executive, like the COO, or in some cases an office manager.

### **Make it Engaging**

People don't really care how much you know until they know how much you care. Greet people as they arrive and make them feel welcome in their own company. Look for ways to make your key message come to life and be easy to relate to for the participants. Let participants contribute and provide feedback using meeting collaboration platforms like MeetingSift, brainstorm ideas with the interactive word cloud, vote on suggestions, ask questions to the speakers. At one time each employee was excited about being with the company, and you should aim to rekindle that excitement on a regular basis. There is no reason why people shouldn't be circling the all-hands dates on their calendars and view them as can't miss events.

## **USE CASE: Create Unity with Participatory Decision Making**

A national Norwegian transportation company uses their all-hands meetings to let employees participate in decision making. By incorporating a digital voting tool, similar to MeetingSift's Poll activity, they let employees make decisions like what their new company headquarters was to be called. Participants' feedback on this practice has been great. Employees say that this practice of participatory decision making "creates unity" and that it makes them feel involved and that their opinions are appreciated.

Incorporating digital meeting collaboration platforms to gather feedback from employees, is a very quick and easy way to engage and excite everyone. This approach shows that you don't need to spend a lot of time or resources in order to make employees feel like they've contributed in a meaningful way.

### 3. The All-Hands Meeting Agenda - Cover the Essentials

The all-hands meetings should include updates on how the company is progressing, good news, customer feedback, and some time at the end for your employees to engage and interact. Having a well designed agenda ensures that nothing is overlooked. MeetingSift offers all-hand meetings agenda templates for meeting leaders, providing the recommended structure, slides, and engaging participant activities. If you don't already have a MeetingSift account, you can sign up for a free trial at [www.meetingsift.com](http://www.meetingsift.com).

#### Best Practice All-Hands Meeting Agenda

**ITEM 1:** **Report news & celebrate success**

The CEO opens the all-hands meeting with a 5-10 minute summary of how the company is doing, acknowledgements, and any big announcements coming up.

**ITEM 2:** **Updates from departments**

Representatives from each department give a brief update on their accomplishments and what they have coming up. Keep reports to 2-3 minutes.

- ◆ Sales and marketing update (VP of Sales)
- ◆ Hiring update and discussion of new roles (VP of HR)
- ◆ Customer testimonials shared (Support Manager)
- ◆ New product features and roadmap update (VP of Product)

**ITEM 3:** **Share the vision**

Share the key message of the all-hands meeting. Let someone besides the CEO do this, to let employees know that the company has more than one great leader setting the direction. Address some of the questions that participants are likely to ask.

**ITEM 4:** **Engage & interact**

This is a great time to use a meeting collaboration platform like MeetingSift to ask participants questions that let them share something personal, and then visualize the responses from the whole group in real-time. You will learn a great

### Keep it short and sweet

By sticking to a structured agenda, keeping the updates brief, and engaging everyone, you can keep your all-hands meetings fast, fun, and informative.

## 4. All-Hands Meetings are Worth Every Minute

Aligning people across teams, and helping them understand how what they're working on contributes to the success of your organization, is not easy. All-hands meetings are the best and most powerful tools you have to accomplish this task, and build a strong, positive culture. Support your all-hands meetings with other related communications, in the form of newsletters, open forums, or idea boards. The more information your team has, the more they're likely to care.

Great questions to ask employees at your all-hands meeting:

- ◆ What are you most proud of doing here?
- ◆ What are you most concerned by?
- ◆ Who on the team would you like to acknowledge for doing something great, and why?
- ◆ What are we forgetting that's important?

To experience the power of employee engagement at all-hands meetings for yourself, sign up for a free trial at [www.meetingsift.com](http://www.meetingsift.com), or contact our solutions team for a demo at [info@meetingsift.com](mailto:info@meetingsift.com).



[info@meetingsift.com](mailto:info@meetingsift.com)



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MeetingSift's easy to use collaboration technology for meetings helps you plan and run more productive meetings, with higher engagement, better decision making, and more consistent follow up.

MeetingSift engages participants via their own smartphones, making meetings of all sizes interactive. Easily conduct live Q&A, brainstorming of ideas and suggestions, or participatory decision making via polling and ranking of alternatives.