



## Hot-Ticket Meetings. (Leadership Planners)

Catherine Hakala-Ausperk. (2020). Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 38 pages, \$19.99, softcover, ISBN 978-0-8389-4628-2.

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To cite this article: Michael Heyd (2020) Hot-Ticket Meetings. (Leadership Planners), Journal of Hospital Librarianship, 20:3, 289-290, DOI: [10.1080/15323269.2020.1779542](https://doi.org/10.1080/15323269.2020.1779542)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15323269.2020.1779542>



Published online: 13 Jul 2020.



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Economist John Kenneth Galbraith has called meetings *indispensable if you don't want to do anything*. Most of us probably agree. Too many meetings are burdensome, boring and enervating. They consume countless hours of staff and leadership time, often with little to show for it. Yet they are ubiquitous in organizations of all kinds, arguably because there is no better means of collaborative communication. The challenge, then, is to make them as efficient and productive as possible, and thousands of articles, books, motivational sessions and YouTube videos have been created to that end. More are produced every day. One of the latest is this little manual by Catherine Hakala-Ausperk, a library consultant, speaker and trainer, and author of several previous books published by the American Library Association.

Hakala-Ausperk begins by acknowledging that meetings are necessary, agreeing that we need to make them better, and audaciously asserting that we can make our meetings so worthwhile that people will actually *want to attend*. She presents her solution via the metaphor of the hot ticket, that coveted admission slip to the must-see concert or Broadway show. Such events are exciting and invigorating, the exact opposite of most meetings in libraries and other organizations. She believes that we can make our meetings similarly engaging and sets out her plan in a mere thirty-eight pages.

Tickets become hot when the performances are legendary, the author says, and by transforming our meetings into hot-ticket events we can make ourselves legendary in our own realms. She combines standard leadership tools such as assessment and planning with a new meeting model based on the concept of a television or theatrical production. The model has six critical success factors: a staff Virtual File, a clear goal for every meeting, a script instead of the old-fashioned agenda, the right cast and crew for each meeting, a successful production, and something happening or changing as a result of the meeting.

The Virtual File is key to Hakala-Ausperk's meeting planner. The idea is to put all information needed for the meeting into a readily accessible location and format and *requiring* all meeting participants (cast members) to review it before the meeting. By removing most information sharing from meetings the Virtual File, which includes minutes of past meetings and background information on the topic at hand, turns them into productive work sessions.

The next step in planning a meeting is to set a specific action goal; for example, not a generic budget meeting but a meeting to approve the final budget. This is akin to Shakespeare deciding to write a play about murder and revenge in the Danish court. Drafting the script comes next. Of course this isn't a predetermined set of lines to be delivered by various speakers in turn. It is a new kind of agenda for the meeting. Instead of a list of topics to be discussed, it sets out the goal to be achieved, what will happen in the meeting to accomplish the goal, and a learning component, such as watching a brief TED talk or discussing a relevant article, that enhances the fun aspect of the session.

Too short to be divided into chapters, this manual consists of ten concise lessons, most devoted to *how* to implement the hot-ticket meeting model in your library. Each section includes one or two worksheets designed to help readers learn by doing (rehearsing) and which also serve as the production tool kit for future meetings. This device is often used in training manuals, but Hakala-Ausperk has integrated it so seamlessly that the expository parts

of the book would hardly be useful without it. She has also infused an impressive amount of practical wisdom into her lessons. Most leadership training urges us to see missteps and failure as learning opportunities, but Hakala-Ausperk goes farther. *Give away credit, keep blame*, she advises, and watch how that improves the culture of your department or library.

*Hot-Ticket Meetings* is attractively designed, its text book-sized pages allowing an easy-to-read font size in plenty of white space. Pertinent quotations from thinkers as disparate as George Bernard Shaw and Erma Bombeck precede the lessons, each accompanied by a small line drawing. No color is used, nor is any needed, even in the section on Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*, which color-codes the various roles assigned to cast members, and this keeps the book's cost quite reasonable.

The approach to meetings outlined in this book is fresh and practical. Ideally, a reviewer would work through the exercises in order to evaluate the book, but that was not practical in this case. However, reflecting on many years of library and hospital meetings, it is easy to see how effective the hot-ticket model could be if rigorously followed, especially at the department level. Its greatest strengths are its focus on specific tasks and the principle of inviting to a meeting only those people to whom the outcome matters and who have a role in achieving the goal. In larger libraries or in the hospital itself, the approach may be impractical. It is hard to imagine the press-conference style management staff meeting with its question and answer component going completely away. Still, the principles presented here could improve almost any meeting.

At times Hakala-Ausperk seems a little too optimistic about her model's chances of success, although she acknowledges that other leadership skills are also essential. For example, leaders must hold meeting participants accountable, just as directors must make sure that cast members get to the theater on time if the show is to go on. If your meetings are to become hot-ticket, you have some hard work ahead of you, but the payoff should be substantial.

*Hot-Ticket Meetings* is directed specifically to librarians, but the model it presents could benefit any organization. (Except for the Procrastinator's Club, they all hold meetings.) Hakala-Ausperk encourages writing in the book: *Think of it as a combination to-do list, diary, and surrogate hairdresser or bartender . . . that can provide you with the space, advice, and the luxury of time to think things through.* It would be nice if the worksheets were available online, but librarians can easily replicate the ones they want to reuse in the future and store them in their own Virtual Files.

For anyone willing to commit to making their meetings the kind that people actually want to attend, the minimal cost of this book will be an excellent investment.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/15323269.2020.1779542>

