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Common Challenges Running a Business Peer Advisory Council

Owning and managing a business peer advisory council (PaC) is an incredible adventure. Here are a few common challenges for you to tackle and overcome!

Experienced, proficient moderators make managing a business peer advisory council appear effortless. The reality is it is not effortless. The most challenging time is right before and during the meeting. It is here where most of the chaos happens. Chaos comes from needing to anticipate how each member will show up for the meeting mentally and unexpected urgent challenges that only reveal themselves when everyone arrives.

Chaos takes many forms, no matter how organized you are for the meeting. You cannot predict a member's last-minute cancellations. Cancellations can significantly impact when that particular member is hosting or presenting that day. This can leave you with a big hole in the agenda. You also cannot predict the countless last-minute texts of members running late or forgetting the meeting even though you sent multiple reminders. You cannot predict the member that suddenly breaks down emotionally because something terrible happened to the business or them personally just the night before. You cannot predict that the always happy and supportive member suddenly becomes silent and withdrawn.

What you can predict is uncertainty.

The key to managing your stress is preparing to handle it when "things happen." While it might not be pleasant when it happens, you will at least be ready with a plan on how to handle it. That alone will reduce your stress level and give you the confidence to maneuver into a successful outcome.

Let's talk about what you can expect to happen in your tenure as a moderator running a business peer advisory council.



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Managing a Business Peer Advisory Council: An Insider's Take

Anticipating possible situations can eliminate many challenges from happening. Noticing behaviors that appear to manifest and addressing festering issues as soon as possible is always the best preventative method for preventing larger problems from developing.

The top common moderator challenges are:

- **Not being prepared. The definition of being prepared for a good meeting is:**
- **Having a structured**, well-thought-out agenda that the members will get value from builds on previous meetings.
- **Making sure** all members are reminded of the meeting location, time, and actions they committed to.
- **Have a relevant backup** item on the agenda if something gets canceled and you need to fill in the time.
- **Plan for the unexpected.** Food being late, technology not working, bad weather.
- **Lack of agreed-to expectations.** If you don't push for excellence and lead by example, neither will the members. Low expectations create poor behavior, such as members not taking accountability seriously, not showing up without letting you know in advance, etc. Common courtesy should be expected. The group also should decide on what they will accept and not accept as guidelines for behavior, expectations for attendance, and basic norms for interacting. This becomes a charter for the group to adhere to and for all future members.
- **Becoming blindly complacent.** Taking your members for granted. They will not always be there, and they will not love every meeting. They all have areas for improvement or ideas of what they would like to see differently. After years of membership, you may believe they will be there for the rest of your life. Especially if you've grown closer to them personally. Keep in mind that they are paying you for an experience, not a service. They change, and they evaluate every meeting to see if their time was worth the time they spent. Make sure the answer is always yes.
- **Underestimating the importance of the agenda.** Don't take meeting preparation lightly. Making the agenda at the last minute will not produce the best meetings. Ideally, draft the agenda for your next meeting right after the meeting when your ideas



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are fresh in your mind. And you have time to prepare others, if need be, before the next meeting.

- **Not having discipline and respect.** Don't take on the hard work of disciplinary conversations or confronting bad behavior because it takes effort, and you think it won't happen again, or worse, that no one noticed. Addressing rudeness, tardiness, unprofessionalism, unkindness, etc., should not be confrontational. It can certainly be done with the same kindness you expect them to display to each other. Respect is a two-way street, and a common mindset is that the moderator doesn't think they deserve the same respect in behavior as their members. But you do. It is essential to address all undesirable behavior immediately. The longer you go, the harder it is to correct.
- **Not being flexible, sticking with the same routine.** The meetings get stale. Changing up the meeting can help to keep people on their toes and stimulate new ideas and energies. Sometimes it's as simple as changing the agenda, holding the meeting in a different setting, doing an activity, or having a retreat in place of the regular meeting. Take a tour of a company everyone admires. There are many options to "change it up."
- **Bring innovation and best practices to your members.** Another option is enhancing your agenda by adding a new template, a new format, a different speaker, or suggesting a book to learn new concepts and discuss a chapter in the meeting.
- **Not being transparent.** As a moderator, you lead by example. In most cases, failing to demonstrate openness, empathy, accountability, and, most importantly, vulnerability will keep your group at the same level as you.
- **Stop learning and innovating.** If you stop learning, you will become less relevant to your group. It will make it harder to recruit as well as retain members. No one wants to be part of something "outdated" or not in tune with new thoughts. Be a thought leader or deliver the thoughts of those leaders. What you can contribute matters. This also means challenging your group to up their game. To step it up and push beyond their comfort zone. It's the only way they will grow, so their company will grow.
- **Bring innovation and best practices to your members.** This means two things. Members' conflicts of interest and members' conflicts of interest with you. Members can develop conflicts with other members either with their thinking or developing a business idea similar to another member. You can be in conflict when your business model of what is best for you is not aligned with what is best for the member. An



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example is bringing on a non-qualified member that is not a right fit for the group because you want the revenue, but they will not be of value to the members already in the group. Saying no to someone who wants to be a member can be hard to turn down, but having the quality of the group degraded is worse.

- **Inability to pivot quickly and be flexible.** Most times, the agenda, as is, never happens. Why? As the meeting evolves, discussions occur that you cannot plan for. They are discussions that happen only when the air in the room opens up and allows them to develop and happen. Don't force an agenda on the members just to follow it. As opportunities arise to have rich conversations and continue the important dialogue, gauge what your members need and desire. Either continue the discussion or move on to what's next. Don't be so rigid that you're just going through the motions rather than orchestrating the meeting's ebb and flow.

What Causes Burnout When Running a Group?

You might not think burnout can occur when running a peer advisory council, but it can and does so frequently after many years. Why? Often, you will feel exhausted after running a meeting. That is because your brain represents just 2% of your total body mass but uses 20% of your body's energy in a typical day. The brain's primary function—processing and transmitting information through electrical signals—is very, very expensive in terms of energy use. Running a peer meeting uses a lot of brainpower in managing the meeting structure, verbal and non-verbal cues, emotions, and timing of discussions while thinking on your feet at all times.

Can you be in control of burnout? Yes, most things on the list below can be avoided when you do the right thing up front and address situations quickly. The top reasons for burnout are:

- ***Always being on point.*** During the meeting, it is normal to feel you have to be at your peak at all times without a break. That is why, after a meeting, take time to relax and do a different activity, and reward yourself for a meeting well done. You need a break to decompress and reflect on what went well and what to do differently next time.
- ***Not having fun.*** This is also important for building a bond. You must have fun; it is not all work and no play. Have fun with the members socially as a group; enjoy lunch or a coffee with them one-on-one. Encourage laughter and bantering in the meeting. They should be having as much fun as you are.



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- **Being surprised.** No matter how in tune you are with each member, you will be surprised when members cancel a meeting with you, suddenly cancel attending their meeting, are no-shows with no notice, etc. Then, when you try to follow up, they do not return calls, texts, or emails. It means something is wrong, which could turn out to be nothing or something. Rule of thumb: anytime your gut triggers a thought that something could be wrong, find out if it's valid. Don't discount that feeling.
- **Excessive turnover.** Having a series of turnovers can be disappointing and disheartening. It's never pleasant to lose a customer. In this case, your members know each other and impact each other's experience. So, losing a member can have multiple negative chains of events. To prevent a bad chain reaction, secure existing members, manage the transition of the member leaving, and sell a new, right-fit prospect as fast as possible.
- **Absent accountability.** Ask the members what level and type of accountability they desire. And then not adhering to making it happen. The members should report and take responsibility for doing what they say, commit to it, and follow through.
- **Not setting Expectations.** Create together a charter for the group that contains agreed-to norms. A charter is a set of guidelines the group determines are important to follow to have a high-functioning group. With no guidelines, they don't have a vision or path for their ultimate role.
- **Doing a lot of 1:1's.** The easiest way to overschedule your time and be over-committed and frazzled is to have one-on-one meetings with each member every month. It becomes a scheduling challenge with last-minute juggling requests, and you will quickly be inefficient with your time and output. These are not necessary unless you are being paid to be an executive coach. And if so, they should be compensated appropriately for their efforts and membership in your peer advisory council. Don't mix the two as a package for participating in a group. You won't get paid accordingly for your time and expertise.
- **Members arriving late and departing early.** Allowing this behavior, unless warranted, is the most disruptive part of a meeting. If it's not addressed, as a moderator, you will have to manage the meeting to be shorter, not end properly, and be receptive to bringing members up to speed on what they missed.
- **Doing it all yourself without any member help.** Members should help give referrals or testimonials so you can attract the best fit for the group. It is in their best interest to do



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that. If you are doing all the heavy lifting with prospecting and selling with excessive turnover, it will feel like being a hamster on a wheel. You will also want to train your members to lead by example, so it's not always you as the moderator. For example, ask another peer member rather than asking the member for a status update. Idea accountability is shared between members as peers rather than between you and the members.

- ***Doing it all yourself without administrative help.*** Always consider what the highest and best use of your time is. Doing the things that are not your strong points—detailed work, scheduling, logistics for meetings, etc.—will drain your energy. Keep your energy for your members and the meeting.

What Happens if a Member Wants to Leave the Group?

Understanding why a member wants to leave the group is essential to learning information and preventing it from recurring. Find out how long they have been thinking about leaving—is it a sudden decision, or has it been on their mind for some time? Is it because of circumstances they are not in control of? Determine if the reason is valid or something you can fix. Perhaps it is only temporary. If the cause is valid, they must leave the group professionally and in person, indicate confidentiality, and publicly thank the group for their help and guidance.

Can another person run your mastermind or peer group?

The beauty of running your peer advisory council is that you can transfer it, keep ownership, or sell it. You have choices. But only if you set it up correctly. Another person can run your peer advisory council if one rule is adhered to - the focus is always on the group. It has to be about them and not about you. It makes no difference if you can answer the question better than they can or if you can share your knowledge before they do. If this is about you, then no, another person cannot run your peer advisory council.

How do you get a good person to run your peer advisory council? The person has to be perceived as possibly more talented than you in business. Their talent should synergize with yours or be from a background complementary to the group. As long as they have one trait or skill set that you do not have, the group will believe the transition is an upgrade. A best practice is to deliberately find something relevant to add value to the group by showcasing an area of their expertise.



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While there are many challenges to running a business peer advisory council, there are also many rewards. By overcoming these obstacles, you can ensure that the benefits continue to accrue, allowing you to reap the benefits of doing this important work that positively impacts so many people's lives.

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