

How do I cope with meetings?

Only a very few of us actually enjoy meetings - for the rest, it is something like torture to sit through the long, repetitive, self-important ramblings of committee members who turn up for meetings and do little else.

You can either sit there, doodling on your agenda, or you can take an active part in the conversation and, believe it or not, meetings always seem shorter when you take an active contribution. You are an activist after all and your capacity to be active is determined by the meetings in which you participate.

Your energy and your conception of what UCU can be is just as valid as the thoughts of the committee members who've been there for the last 10 years. So, meetings are not something to be endured - they can be the springboard for bringing about the changes you want to make.

There can no distinction between committee members and activists - every member of an executive committee should be an activist, and every activist should want to be on the executive committee.

Be careful however: people who have an opinion on everything, and express those opinions at every opportunity, end up being ignored. Be judicious in what you say and when you say it - a well-chosen word said at the right time can change the nature of a discussion to your benefit much more effectively than a five-minute rant.

You can do something very practical to get an advantage in meetings: buy a copy of Citrine's *The ABC of Chairmanship* (available from Bookmarks in London). It's quite an old text with a few updates in the last 50 years but it is the DEFINITIVE guide to how a meeting should be run, and to how a committee should be managed.

Even the barest grasp of Citrine will enable you to direct meetings effectively - whether in the chair or not - as most committee members are fairly content to cope with meetings in an informal fashion. You will be surprised at how galvanising it is to propose a motion, or ask for a quorum count, in a normal committee meeting. You wouldn't drive a car without proper instruction - Citrine is the owner's manual for effective meetings.

There are some other tips which may seem pretty obvious but need to be stated:

- Arrive on time - latecomers miss important items, and irritate those who do turn up on time.

- Raising your voice or losing your temper = instant defeat.
- Sometimes you have to compromise on the road to getting what you want - don't be ashamed of it, and come back with new proposals at the next meeting.
- And most importantly - collective responsibility applies to you even if you completely disagree with the decisions made. If you decide to ignore the committee decision, you'll undermine the branch or local association and weaken everything it does. Your ultimate responsibility is to the members - don't betray them in a fit of pique.

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