Try This

This checklist combines all of the action items throughout *Meetings Matter: 8 Powerful Strategies for Remarkable Conversations* by Paul Axtell.

Strategy 1: Choose the Perspective: This Matters

- ☐ Practice doing one thing at a time. Focus all of your attention on this particular situation in this moment. See what happens.
- ☐ Catch yourself not looking forward to something, then find a new perspective.
- ☐ Practice owning the meetings you attend, then be aware of what you notice and what you might do differently.
- ☐ Put together a collection of seven phrases that remind you of how you want to deal with life.

Strategy 2: Master Effective Conversation

- ☐ For the next week, stop and devote your full attention to everyone who speaks to you.
- ☐ Allow people to finish without interruption.
- ☐ Be slower to offer solutions or advice.
- ☐ In your meetings for the next week, observe conversations for clarity.
- ☐ Whenever you notice yourself wondering what someone else means, ask for clarity.
- ☐ After each meeting, reflect on what you said and how you said it, taking note of your observations or insights.
- ☐ As each meeting topic is wrapped up, assess it against the four elements of effective conversation: clarity, candor, commitment, and completion. Speak up if anything is missing that would be useful to add.
- ☐ Look for examples of how words shape the world for you and others.

Strategy 3: Create Supportive Relationships

- ☐ Listen for what you can learn about people in each meeting.
- ☐ Notice the response of others when you are intentional about connecting with them.
- ☐ Leave each meeting with the name of someone with whom to follow up.
- ☐ Observe how other people open conversations. How do the people who excel at working the room begin their conversations with you? How do senior people interact with others in meetings?

Observations & Ideas

Observations & Ideas

- ☐ Develop a set of conversation openers that resonate with you. Here's a starter set:
  - *I'd love to hear about your career. Tell me about your early days with the organization.*
  - *Tell me about your family.*
  - *What are your outside interests?*
  - *What projects are you working on?*
  - *Do you have any interesting trips planned for this year?*

  Be willing to ask simple questions: *I have no idea what you do—can you explain that to me?*
- ☐ Encourage people to tell you more about themselves.
- ☐ Notice when people want you to talk.
- ☐ Invite someone to coffee.
- ☐ Listen in a way that honors each person who speaks. Devote yourself to each of the conversations in which you participate. Hold back your questions and just listen. Use the phrase, *"Tell me more."* Stay silent when people finish a thought to see if they start speaking again.
- ☐ Recover the lost art of checking in with people. Ask people about their interests, their projects, their travels, their kids. It doesn't take much time. Ask a question, and then listen for three or four minutes.
- ☐ Learn to work the room. For many people, working the room and interacting with others in a wonderful, gracious way does not come naturally. That's fine, but it doesn't excuse you from getting good at this if you work in an organization.
- ☐ Keep track of your relationships. Maintaining a journal of people you meet and your conversations with them will help you remember.
- ☐ Reconnect with two people each week.

Strategy 4: Decide What Matters and Who Cares

- ☐ For every meeting, list the possibilities and value associated with each topic on the agenda.
- ☐ Make a list of what matters to your group or organization and compare it to your agenda topics for the last three weeks.
- ☐ Give people permission to question whether their attendance is required.

Observations & Ideas

Strategy 5: Design Each Conversation

- ☐ For two weeks, listen for the setup on every topic and assess whether it was adequate.
- ☐ For two weeks, listen for the elements of closure and assess whether the wrap-up for each topic was adequate.
- ☐ Set aside fifteen minutes to prepare for each of your next five one-on-one meetings and see if you notice a qualitative difference in how they work.

Strategy 6: Lead Meetings for Three Outcomes

- ☐ Focus on critical variables for the setup:
  - Have you established permission to lead and agreements for the group? Do people know they can say or ask anything?
  - Are the outcomes for each conversation clear?
  - Is the process to be followed clear?
- ☐ Focus on critical variables for managing the conversation:
  - Has the conversation veered off track?
  - Has each conversation been taken to completion with next steps identified?
  - Was everyone taken care of during the conversation?

Strategy 7: Participate in Meetings to Have Impact

- ☐ Listen for what others are interested in or care about.
- ☐ Listen for the value being created in the conversation.
- ☐ Listen for what each person is dealing with in his or her area.
- ☐ Listen for what you appreciate about each person.
- ☐ Listen for opportunities to contribute to the conversation.
- ☐ Notice when you have an idea to share but don't speak.
- ☐ Rate your speaking for how clear, concise, relevant, and respectful it was.
- ☐ After each meeting for the next two weeks, reflect on what you said, how you said it, and what impact your comments had on the group conversation.
- ☐ Reflect on what you bring to a particular meeting or group:
  - *What do people rely on you for?*
  - *What do they appreciate about their interactions with you?*
- ☐ Begin to observe people who speak in a way you admire. What is it about what they say or how they say it that elicits respect?

Observations & Ideas

Strategy 8: Build Remarkable Groups

- ☐ Notice what you say outside of the meeting about the group or individuals in the group. If it is not positive, learn to keep from saying it.
- ☐ Look for what you might offer in terms of support to other team members.
- ☐ Invite the newest member of the team to coffee and see if he or she would like support.
- ☐ Think about how you might ask the group to support you.

The Art of Learning

- ☐ Choose a learning perspective for meetings—go into each one prepared to observe and learn as much as you can about what makes them successful.
- ☐ When you are around small children, watch them learn and remind yourself what it's like to be open and curious and fine with not knowing all the answers.
- ☐ Use each meeting as an opportunity to develop meeting mastery. In every meeting for a series of about ten, pick something to look for from the lists above. Notice what you notice and make notes. Then pick something else for the next ten meetings, and so on.
- ☐ Notice what there is to notice on your drive to work. This will give you practice with the idea of observing and seeing what there is to see. This is the first step in being mindful.
- ☐ Go into a meeting with the self-instruction to just hear and see what is there to be heard and seen.
- ☐ Each day find fifteen to twenty minutes to reflect on an important conversation.
- ☐ Don't put the car radio on while driving or the earbuds in while running or cycling and notice where your mind goes.
- ☐ After every meeting, take a moment and note what you learned.
- ☐ After important meetings, schedule forty-five minutes to debrief with someone, perhaps over lunch or on a walk. Use these questions: *What did you notice during the meeting? What insights do you have? What are you now thinking about? What might you have done differently?*
- ☐ If any of your employees are working on meeting skills, provide support by debriefing with them once or twice a month over coffee.
- ☐ Read a section or chapter of this book for fifteen minutes, twice a week, and then relax and wait for the insights and connections to appear as you attend meetings.

- ☐ In meetings, split your note-taking paper into two sections. Use the left-hand two-thirds for notes on the topics that are discussed. Use the right-hand third of the page to record your insights about the meeting process.
- ☐ Don't allow yourself to do other work in a meeting or take anything into the meeting that might distract you.
- ☐ Keep side conversations to a minimum.
- ☐ Create three blocks of time each week for uninterrupted work.
- ☐ Replace the "smart" technology gadget that connects you with (and pulls you into) the world outside the meeting with a small paper notebook to record your insights. Notice the difference in your focus and participation—and the quality of your insights.
- ☐ Ask someone to observe as you lead a meeting or when you're presenting during a meeting.
- ☐ Begin keeping a journal of daily insights.

Guidelines for Managers

- ☐ Find a way to remind yourself that you matter to others.
- ☐ Slow down and acknowledge people you meet.
- ☐ Ask people for input (*What do you think?)* and where they stand on issues (*Where are you with this?).*
- ☐ For the next week, acknowledge a presenter in every meeting by sharing what you are taking away from his or her remarks.

Observations & Ideas

PAUL AXTELL. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.