

Meeting Minutes – Will yours stand up in court?

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This article is not offering legal advice and I don't represent myself as having a legal background.

Now that I have your attention, one of the communication tools that project teams use or should be using are Meeting Minutes. Meeting Minutes record information shared, commitments, documents distributed or presented, approvals, denials, completed actions and new actions.

A few years ago, the company where I was employed was sued over a design project. Fortunately, I was not involved but I did hear on a daily basis about all the documents being copied and presented in court. One token of advice I got from the president of the company was as a Project Manager think about if I were sued and prepare accordingly. One of the documents discussed was the Meeting Minutes.

Keeping that in mind and here is a format I use:

Document Header

Title – Owner, Project title, City, State

Meeting Name – XYZ Product Development Review Meeting

Date of Meeting – **Some variations add start time**

Location – May be a conference room at your company or the client's facility

Meeting Number – If it is one in a series like design reviews.

List of Attendees – Full name and Company. Since some people come to meetings as needed, I have added a **Yes/No column** to indicated present or not for each meeting. All names on the list, whether in attendance or not, should receive copies of the Meeting Minutes.

Standard Agenda – Example

1. Introductions
2. Review previous Meeting Minutes
3. Design Status – agenda
4. Schedule Status - agenda
5. Costs Status - agenda
6. Adjourn

Body of Meeting Minutes:

Item Number – Each discussion, open issues, shared information should have an item number. This will show when it was initially recorded. Also, it is helpful for referencing later as updates are made.

Description/Information – This is where decisions, shared information, and open issues are captured. The more detail the better but just the right amount of detail to clearly capture the information. *For example:* Prelim design presented, reviewed, and approved by Bob Smith, Client.

Action Required – List any follow up actions required to complete a task, resolve an open issue. *For example:* Send full set of drawings of prelim design to Bob Smith, Client. Other information to include, in what format: Hard, CAD, or PDF.

Responsible/Owner – Name of individual responsible for the action required. Who will be accountable for ensuring Bob Smith gets the drawings?

Completion Date – Each item that has an action item should have a completion date.

Completed - This is a column to check mark completed items.

Errors and Omissions Clause – When the minutes are sent out always ask for reports of any information that may have been omitted, incomplete, or was misinterpreted within 24 hours. Let the receivers know that no response is perceived as an acceptance of the information as recorded. Until recently this was in my e-mail distributing the minutes. I have since added it to the bottom of my meeting minutes.

A good practice is to issue the meeting minutes within 48 hours of the meeting. This keeps information fresh in front of the team and keeps stakeholders current.

Having the form is one thing, using it and using it consistently is another. Accuracy of the notes recorded is critical for successful meeting minutes. Listening and asking questions to become important skills for each Meeting Minute Recorder.

Speaking of the Recorder, one method that can be used is rotating the role of Recorder. The Recorder has to focus on all discussions and is forced to ask questions about items he/she may not be familiar with, thus improving their knowledge of the project. Also, after a turn as Recorder, team members are a little more engaged in future meetings. Another interesting development I have seen is that side conversations tend to disappear.

I hope you find this information helpful.