How to Conduct a Lean Coffee

Introduction
The Lean Coffee approach is a melding of Open Space Technology (OST) and Personal Kanban (PK) that was created by Jim Benson and Jeremy Lightsmith. OST is a process for having a group democratically develop an agenda for conversations and then manage that agenda. PK is used to visually manage the conversation.

The Lean Coffee Process
- Set-up a Personal Kanban with the process steps: “Ready”, “Discussing” and “Complete”. Use sticky notes on the table top.
- Do a quick (2 minute) check in to see how everyone is doing and for introductions.
- Have participants propose discussion topics, one topic per sticky note. Each proposer takes 15 - 30 seconds to pitch their topic to the group. Once all the topics have been pitched, voting begins to establish a priority for discussing the topics. Each person gets two votes. Vote by making tally marks on the sticky
- Order the discussion topic stickies from highest to lowest votes in the “Ready” column of the PK.
  - Agree to a time box for discussing each topic. 8 minutes is a good starting point. Try 4 minute follow up time if group decides to continue the conversation. Use a timer to track the time.
- When ready for discussing, the poser for the topic moves the sticky from the “Ready” column to the “Discussing” column and starts the conversation.
- When time runs out use the Roman voting—thumbs up, down or sideways— to decide on continuing the conversation for another 4 minutes or move on. When topic has ended, move the sticky to the “Complete” column and go to the next sticky note.
- 5 minutes before the end of the time conduct a quick retrospective of how much value was produced by the conversation. Some approaches are:
  - “Fist of Five” to designate with a show of fingers how much they got from the session. 5 means best, no fingers mean a waste of time. On the count of three, everyone displays their fingers.
  - Plus Delta — Plus what was of value and Delta what do we change to produce more value
- Some groups establish a note-taker for the session: short recaps of the topic.