



7 STEPS TO RUNNING MORE PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS

Inefficiency is a big drain on your bottom line, so meet wisely.

By Scott Belsky

We all know that meetings are expensive. Time is precious, and having many people in a room is costly by any measurement. The cost of an interrupted work flow is even worse, especially for a small business. Adequately utilising valuable employee time is one of a leader's key responsibilities. You might be especially productive early in the morning, from the moment you start working. I might require an hour or so of build-up time before I'm ready to get cranking. But when a meeting starts, our preferences and differences are cast aside. Meetings strip us of the core tenet of the creative process: autonomy.

Creating useful meetings

We can't rid the world of meetings. After all, the benefits of meeting can outweigh the costs. But we can meet more wisely. Here are a handful of the tips I have observed in productive teams:

1. Beware of 'Posting Meetings'

If you leave a meeting without action steps, then you should question the value of the meeting (especially if it is recurring). A meeting to 'share updates' should actually be a voice-mail or an email.

2. Abolish Monday Meetings

Gathering people for no other reason than 'it's Monday!' makes little-to-no sense, especially when trying to filter through the bloated post-weekend inbox. Automatic meetings end up becoming 'posting' meetings.

3. Finish With a Review of Actions Captured

At the end of every meeting, go around and review the action steps each person has captured. The exercise takes less than 30 seconds per person, and it almost always reveals a few action steps that were missed. The exercise also breeds a sense of accountability. If you state your action steps in front of your colleagues, then you are likely to follow through.

4. Make All Meetings 'Standing Meetings'

One best practice I observed in the field was 'standing meetings' – meetings in which people gather and remain standing. The tendency to sit back and reiterate points – commentate rather than content-make – dwindles as people get weak in the knees. Standing meetings become more actionable. Most impromptu meetings that are called to quickly catch up on a project or discuss a problem can happen in ten minutes or less.

5. State the Purpose of Every Meeting at the Start

Start every meeting with a simple question: “Why are we here, and what are we supposed to accomplish?” Laying out the objective and setting the meeting's tone is one of the leader's key responsibilities.

6. Bring Back Transit Time

Building in 10-15 minutes of travel time between meetings can significantly reduce stress. In an article for Harvard Business Review, entrepreneur and business writing teacher, David Silverman, makes the point that, in grade school, when the bell would ring, we knew we had 15 minutes to get to the next class.

“Why is it?” he asks “that when we graduate, they take away our bells, replace them with an irritating ‘doink’ sound signaling ‘five minutes until your next meeting’ and assume we can now teleport to the location?” What could cause such madness? In two words: Microsoft Outlook. It seems that the default principles of corporate scheduling have stripped us of the precious transit time that keeps peace of mind between meetings. To bring it back, Silverman suggests that, when scheduling an hour-long meeting, put it in the calendar for 50-minutes.

7. If You Must Meet, Meet on Tuesday at 3pm

LifeHacker reported a retrospective study from the online meeting scheduling service “When is Good” where, after reviewing over 100 000 responses to 34 000 events on their platform, they realised that Tuesday at 3pm was the most ‘available’ spot for a meeting. Such a finding suggests that there may be certain times (and days) during the week that, despite varied work flows, work best for your team. Hey, it's not scientific, but it's worth keeping in mind.

Think before you meet

Admired leaders recognise the need to measure the value of meetings. Among the most productive leaders and teams I observed throughout the research for my new book, I found that the vast majority of teams shared a healthy hesitation to call meetings. Consider the above tips as ammunition against wasting precious resources in your small business.

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