



How to Work Smart, Go Home Early and Still Come Out On Top

Would you like to work 4, 6 or even 8 hours less each week? What if you could accomplish so much work each day, you could literally go home early every day. What if you could do all that and have the management singing your praises?

Before you say dream on, a recent survey of 38,000 people in 200 countries revealed that the average professional was productive only three days of the week. That means an average of 16 hours a week could be eliminated without compromising results. The top time wasters were: unclear objectives, lack of team communication, and ineffective meetings.

Specific U.S. statistics:

- The average work week was 45 hours, with 16 of those hours considered to be unproductive.
- The number of hours spent in meetings each week was 5.5 hours, with 71% feeling those meetings were unproductive.

Most of us wish we could skip meetings all together, but alas, that is not possible. Why? Because meetings are where information is shared, and decisions are made. Unfortunately, rather than being productive, the majority of meetings boil down to nothing more than a boring rehash of

incomplete information tossed around by dominant egos or silo keepers.

Success today depends not just on our knowledge, but also on our ability to relate and actively engage a globally and demographically diverse population. Focused flexibility and adaptability is the name of the game. Especially today, where the meetings may require latte-sipping Generation Xers, Generation Y software developers, and a handful of middle-aged Sarbanes Oxley auditors to connect and gain consensus during a virtual net-meeting.

To help you be more productive and go home early, here are 4 of the most common business meetings challenges and a few suggestions on how to overcome them.

PROBLEM: Trying to accomplish too much.

Do not attempt to have an information dump, solve problems, make decisions, and develop a plan of action, all in one short meeting.

SOLUTION:

Follow the TOT (The One Thing) principle. First, be clear on your highest priority and purpose for that specific meeting. Ask yourself, "If at the end of the meeting we only accomplish one thing, what would I want that one thing to be?" Then determine the people, time and techniques needed to accomplish that – one-thing. Rome wasn't built in a day. Keep your meetings short, sweet and successful with the TOT principle. After a certain time, management like Moses, will want to say, "let my people go" back to work please.

PROBLEM: Lacking Clear Objectives.

If you see the target, you won't be able to hit it. Yet many meetings start with a review of the agenda with no mention whatsoever of the objective or purpose of the meeting. When no clear objective is stated at the start of a meeting, attendees feel justified in bringing up any topic that is important to them. This creates the ideal environment for a perfect storm.

SOLUTION:

Before every meeting determine the TOT. The one thing you want to accomplish. Then determine the steps that the attendees will need to move through to all end up at that final point. Now when you start your meeting, begin with a clear vision of it's purpose before

reviewing the agenda steps to take you all the way through to that objective.

PROBLEM: Failure to Engage Participant.

Meetings need to have the right participants. Next, the right structure so that there is sufficient time for conversation, debate, and potential airing of "the known, but seldom discussed political issues". Too often team members are asked to carve out valuable time for meetings in which they have no real participation. Equally disastrous meetings are those that either dance around the elephant or clearly admit they don't have enough time to discuss the elephant, but require a decision. If participants aren't engaged, they quickly reach for cell phones, Blackberries, and laptops. They are physically present; their mind's have left the meeting.

SOLUTION:

Once you know the objective, determine who should be invited and why. Then in your opening comments at the start of the meeting, let participants know why they are there. Let them know what is expected of them. For example, "The objective of this meeting is to determine how best to address the XYZ situation in Accounts Payable. Joe, this is where your knowledge of the interfaces will be crucial. Mary, you were specifically invited because of your experience implementing the global fixes. Our goal today is to develop a list of . . .," Etc.

PROBLEM: Failure to Utilize the Right Tools and Techniques.

We have all been taught that every meeting should have an agenda. Believe it or not, sometimes developing an agenda before the meeting can actually be a bad thing.

SOLUTION:

If problem solving is the objective, the nature of the problem(s) may not be apparent until the group meets, making an agenda premature and possibly a deterrent. Also, if you come into the meeting assuming you know what the problem is, and go right into solution finding, you may end up developing a great solution to the wrong problem. An agenda is a guide to accomplish the purpose of the meeting. As such it is a tool with enormous power and flexibility when used correctly.

Unproductive meetings waste time, money, and increase frustration. They feed a culture of apathy, mediocrity and lack of accountability.

Meetings are a fact of life. Some 25 million meetings take place in corporate America daily. And they should and can produce results.

Henry Ford, pioneer of the assembly-line production method once said, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

And "working together" is what successful meetings are all about. When all is said and done, the effectiveness

of your meetings can be a good barometer of your ability to work together effectively in other arenas. When a team is focused, and uses the right tools and techniques to accomplish clearly understood objectives, they are unstoppable.

Imagine what just 25 - 40% improvement in your meeting productivity could mean to the growth of your organization and your personal success.

Improving your meetings skills will not just increase your meeting results, it will also set in motion a pattern of dialog and synergistic collaboration that will skyrocket your success.

FOLLOW THE TOT PRINCIPLE

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