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Been to a meeting lately?

By Paperitalo Staff

Read somewhere recently that US businesses conduct *17 million meetings per day*.

There has probably never been invented a function turned more dysfunctional than meetings. Who invented these things and what can we do about them?

Meetings were probably invented by organized religion. Look no further than early New England where churches were often called “Meeting Houses” and planned attendance was described as “going to meeting.” Down through the centuries, religions have tended to keep their “meetings” organized and following a rigid schedule. Those of us in business, however, have often turned these into an unorganized free-for-all devoid of any time consciousness.

We have discussed this subject before, but your brave writer thinks it is time to try some new tactics.

If you are holding a meeting, and its general purpose is to disseminate information, consider using a memo or email and eliminating the meeting it all together. If you are the leader and the purpose is to have an exchange and generate ideas, keep the attendance small—5 people in a meeting with all providing input is much more efficient than a 20 person meeting.

Other things you can do (besides having an agenda and sticking rigidly to a time schedule) are make the room uncomfortable. Have a stand up meeting. Adjust the temperature to be very warm or very cool. Bring a big desk clock and watch it. Do anything to avoid a meeting taking on the appearance of a bunch of friends sitting around in their living room for a nice chat.

If you have been asked to attend a meeting, do not go unless there is a pre-published agenda (unless it is your boss—do not be stupid!). Treat meetings not in your area of responsibility as optional, but be courteous and send your regrets ahead of time. Do not go to a meeting without being prepared. Schedule something else to occur at the published end time for the meeting and when that time comes, excuse yourself and leave.

In general it is worth remembering that meetings must be extremely efficient for the entity for which you work to receive value from them. Four people together for an hour have expended half a day’s salary costs. Twenty people together for an hour have expended half a week’s salary costs. If one is to be fiscally responsible in these matters, it is obviously that meeting efficiency must be very high.

For safety this week, when was the last time you looked at the means of egress from any room in which you are attending a meeting? No matter if you are on the first floor in the mill's administration building or the 30th floor at corporate headquarters, it is obviously wise to fully understand the path to safety should an emergency occur. This would be a good first topic on every meeting agenda, presented for all to understand. We will talk next week. ##