



onlyPulpandPaperJobs.com

## ***Meetings are killing us***

By Paperitalo Staff

I spent four years at my first professional assignment. In that entire time, I was never in a meeting of more than 15 minutes, and even then it was never with more than one other person. In other words, I was never in a meeting room with a group of people. It helped that in the entire facility there were no conference rooms (there were also no doors on the restroom stalls, but that is another story). I never went to an offsite meeting, because there were none. This was a successful business then and in fact, it has grown by leaps and bounds since that time. When in the neighborhood, I still drive by it occasionally and note that the office space has not expanded since the last addition in 1972 (although the workshops have probably doubled in size).

Since moving to a home office a number of years ago, I have learned to have picomeetings (nano—10 raised to -9—is so last year). Picomeetings are meetings between the synapses in my brain. They are quick, easy, over and allow one to move on to real work. They have the added benefit of easy conflict resolution—and just in case one's right brain has a fight with one's left brain, employ a psychiatrist for an hour a month, which costs only \$125 in our area.

My purpose here is not to suggest the abandonment of all meetings. In fact, in a manufacturing setting as complex as a pulp and paper mill, one must have a morning production meeting, seven days a week, as well as a Friday afternoon weekend planning meeting. This is an important method for many departments to communicate vital information efficiently. I even like the Japanese concept of all the top managers of a company or facility having permanent places around a large conference table (and no other offices). This is also a method of assuring good communications.

The meetings that are killing us are different. They are the endless strategy meetings that occur in some companies. Or the team building meetings that some think are so important. Strategy meetings should be rare and involve a very limited number of top level players. Sorry, but everyone else in an organization is about tactics—execution of the strategy.

Meetings seem to occur for several unhealthy reasons. Some are called by people who need a place to grandstand their own agendas and puff up their own egos. Others are called by people

fearful of making a decision and being held accountable for it, so they call a meeting to “gather more input.” None of these reasons have anything to do with spinning the invoice printer.

The meetings I despise the most however, don’t even look like meetings. They are between an “important person” and an assistant planning a trip. You know the drill—“Bobbie, I need to go to Albuquerque next Tuesday. Can you come in here so we can talk about travel arrangements?” This innocent inquiry initiates a waste of half of Bobbie’s day as they go endlessly back and forth with important person over every arcane detail. These meetings take place to stroke the important person’s ego and because the important person is not able to do things for themselves. By the way, if you have not learned how easy it is to make travel arrangements online yourself (once you get the hang of it, you will do the whole thing in less time than it took you to talk to Bobbie once), you are about 5 to 8 years behind the times.

Meetings that communicate real information among disparate parties are important and vital. Test every meeting to this standard. Don’t go to the ones that don’t live up to these criteria (unless your boss calls one—hey, let’s not get stupid here). You will be amazed how much time you gain to do real work.

Safety meetings are important meetings, too — probably the only kind of team building meetings of value. Have them regularly. Be safe and we will talk next week. ##