



MONDAY MOTIVATOR

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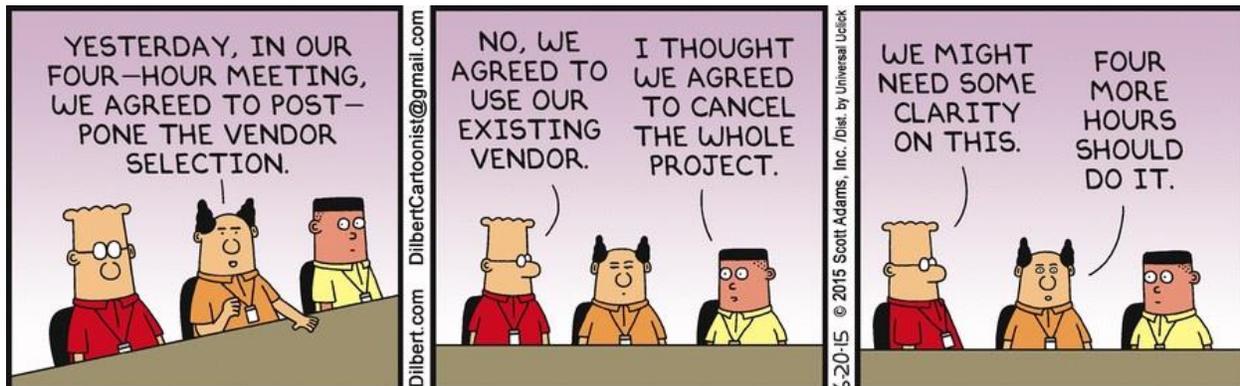
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EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Meetings are powerful tools that are widely misunderstood. Like many professionals, we have read and enjoyed many Dilbert comics that point out the pain and frustration of poorly run meetings. In fact, I'm guessing we've all had our share of disappointing meetings. I'll share a short example with you and data showing that just how widespread bad meetings have become. Finally, we will look at some good practices including the most powerful meeting tips used by a writer who covers such topics; [Bruce Harpham, the founder of Project Management Hacks](#).



Wow! Now there's something to think about as it applies to meetings. So, what is it about meetings that many people feel are largely a waste of time? Here at Performance Strategies we work with a variety of companies in both the product and the service space. Our clients tell us that meetings don't work when there is no agenda. We agree. Here are seven takeaways we find useful to anyone planning a meeting of any kind:

1. Have an agenda and plan the time length of the meeting based on whether the meeting is to discuss tactical issues or strategic ones. Keep the meetings below 20 minutes for anything non-strategic and below one hour for strategic planning discussions. Vague intentions to have a discussion on a topic rarely end on a productive note. Consider making a point form list of topics to be discussed and make sure that material is provided to attendees at least one day before the meeting. For

better results, provide background information on the agenda so that everyone attending has the same information. For frequently held meetings, such as a weekly status meeting on a project, you can save time by creating a meeting template. Once you have that in place, preparing an agenda becomes a matter of filling in the blanks.

2. Manage the time. When nobody takes charge of managing the time, it is easy to become careless and unfocused. Remember – when people attend a meeting they cannot do anything else. Make the time count. If you are the meeting organizer remember that starting a meeting on time and ending on time will enhance your reputation as an organized person. For meeting attendees always arrive 2 or 3 minutes early and bring what you will need in the meeting room. Also, consider restroom time before the meeting. Getting up and leaving the room during the meeting is a distraction and uses up time if someone needs to explain what took place in your absence.



3. If power point slides are going to be used for illustration, be sure more than one person has seen the slides prior to the meeting. One of the biggest complaints we hear from our clients is that many times, such slides are overkill with nearly useless information on them, or they contain so much data on one slide that reading them is a challenge. [Using power point slides for the sake of illustrating a point](#) is redundant if all the presenter is going to do is read what's on the slide. Consider passing out notes with presentation comments on the note sheets and plenty of space in the margins for note taking. Another presentation method we see is a print out of the slide contents with lines to the right of the slide images to take notes on. NOTE: when a meeting is going to include any type of projected data be sure to test the projector well before the meeting starts, not when it is already underway. As they say in the world of Audio Visual technology; "The devil is in the details!" If it can go wrong it WILL go wrong! You can count on it. So, test the video, and audio if sound is going to be needed, before the meeting starts.

4. Who is going to be included in the meeting? The people in the meeting room make or break your effectiveness. If a key person – a manager or executive – is not present, many times significant decisions cannot be made. For meeting organizers: limit the number of people attending the meeting. The purpose of meetings is to make decisions and get work done. For the most part, meetings are not the best way to simply share information (exception: meetings are helpful to share sensitive information). For meeting attendees: read the attendee list before you walk into the room. Do you see any unfamiliar names? If so, consider looking them up in your organization’s directory (or on LinkedIn). Surprises are not your friend when it comes to meetings.
5. Manage distractions. Decide in advance whether to allow devices into the room at all. If the meeting is about issues that require one or more of the attendees to have access to data that is not part of the meeting materials then plan for this. If you do allow cell phones / computers / tablets into the room ask at the start of the meeting for all phones to be set to silence before the meeting starts.
6. Consider the “Parking Lot” method of handling slightly off topic discussions. This helpful consideration performs two useful functions. First, it serves to keep the meeting focused on the stated agenda. Second, the parking lot acknowledges important points raised by attendees. Warning: The parking lot must be combined with follow up if you wish to be truly effective. Otherwise, you are likely to gain a reputation for simply making a show of acknowledging other people. As a meeting organizer, here are a few steps to use the parking lot concept: At the beginning of the meeting, explain that you expect everyone to focus their discussions on the agenda. Further, explain that this rule will help the meeting stay productive and end on time.
 - Keep the meeting agenda document in front of you as a guide.
 - Go through each agenda item before getting into the discussions.
 - Monitor and contribute to the discussions.
 - When someone raises an interesting point that does not relate to the agenda, say the following: “Thank you for that point, however, that point goes beyond the purpose of this meeting. Let me write down that item in the



parking lot and I will include it in the meeting notes that I will send out by email so we can explore that point at the right time.”

7. Acknowledgement and agreements are everything. Since meetings are usually about situations that require actions steps from people in the room, make it a point to assign responsibility to those people, and at the very end of the meeting summarize what took place. When Jay and I wrap up meetings with our clients one of us will state ... “So, what we talked about today was ... and the agreements we have with each other include the following ... are we all good?” This serves to cap the productivity of the meeting and acknowledge our mutually agreed upon action steps.
8. Take notes and follow up. For most people participating in meetings, taking notes is an essential skill. Taking notes in a paper notebook or business journal is better than using a computer or tablet. Social reasoning is the key here... people don’t know if you’re checking your E Mail or actually taking notes and the distraction of computer keys being pressed can irritate others. Finally, there should be some sort of follow up on meetings. The art and science of follow up is vital professional skill and it also matters in the context of meetings. When it comes to meeting tips, following up in a timely basis is a great way to manage stress and make a good impression on others. For the best results, we suggest following up (e.g. making a phone call, writing an email etc.) the same day as the meeting. For very important matters, make a note on your calendar or task management tool of choice to continue following up until you reach a resolution.

In summary, meetings can be highly productive events when planned properly. Can you use some help with any of the topics discussed in this edition? Give us a call. We love meetings!

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