



How To Avoid The 11 Common Faults of Meeting Management

CALL TO ORDER

by

The Strategist
Ron Hequet

Ever hear the chairperson of a meeting follow-up with saying, "Wow, I put on a lousy meeting." No, meetings are never identified as 'bad' by the person to whom the meeting belongs. And with all the 'how-to' resources available on how to have a good meeting, including my own "CALL TO ORDER" 7 Faults You Must Avoid - DVD with Action Guide (actumconsulting.com/resources.htm), why do we still have 'death by meeting?'

I just returned from a meeting that a client wanted me to attend as part of my initial analysis of the company. It was a corporate culture example, a real yawner. Even writing about it on the return flight, I'm finding it difficult to garner anything positive (and I always look for the positive). The meeting was another in a long line of time and talent killers. Bad meetings all have their own

idiosyncrasies, but most go something like this...

The meeting was scheduled for 8:00. Since I was the outsider, I arrived at 7:40, hoping to meet new people and briefly get acquainted, but found myself alone in the meeting room. At 8:00 the person responsible for the meeting arrived (we'll call him/her 'Leader'), and starts arranging tables and chairs, the obligatory coffee and donuts, and stacking up hand-outs. Two other participants came in, talking on cell phones, grab a coffee and sit down while talking and texting. They start to scan the handout material, still talking and texting. A few more people arrive and since the meeting has not started, they deal with their personal belongings, get coffee and mill around in relaxed conversation, like at a cocktail party.

About 8:17 the 'Leader' announces, "Looks like some are going to be late, but let's get started anyway." Nobody is mindful of the 'Leader' who is now seated and scans the room craving signs of respect. Slowly they take their seats, still talking but in lower tones.

The 'Leader' says, "Before we get started, let's take care of some 'housekeeping' issues." The 'Leader' does not yet have the group's attention. Someone asked, "How long is this going to be? I have another meeting." Another says, "I have to leave early." The 'Leader' responds with, "Okay, but this information is important, stay as long as you can." "Now, first up is Judy's report." She picks up a pile of paper and passes it around. She then begins a sleepy overview of the obvious, but does mention a few helpful extras. Many are flipping the pages, and are showing the body language that shouts, "I have the information, who needs a report?" Judy continues but I can see she senses that no one is paying close attention. When she finishes, nobody asks any questions.

The meeting continues along those lines and then, Bob arrives late. He tiptoes (as if no one sees him) over to the

coffee, gets a cup and then moves toward Linda and murmurs "*Anybody sitting here?*" As he sits down everyone is watching, no particular reason, it's just something else going on. The meeting continues and the awkwardness is palpable.

As most of us expect in meetings like this, they run over time because a few discussions go beyond reason. And, the 'brainstorming' on a particular issue didn't produce any new ideas, but it did bring up unresolved matters that now *needed* to be added to the agenda.

WHOA HOSS! To this point, have I described any similarities to meetings you have attended? When I think of the collective waste of time and talent, my eyes roll back in my head as in 'death by meeting'.

Here are some pointers that will make a difference in your next meeting...

- ✓ Do not meet for dissemination of information; that's what reports are for, along with email, et al.
- ✓ Meet only for a predetermined purpose / objective; once you eliminate the information meetings, what's left? If

- it's not about making a decision, why meet? Even 'brainstorming' sessions have a structure.
- ✓ Issue a written agenda to participants 24-48 hours in advance; preparation for a meeting is imperative for its success.
 - ✓ Get coffee and get settled *before* the scheduled start time and bring your own energy; enter enthusiastically, greet others, ask questions, offer pertinent suggestions, etc. If because of an earthquake or tsunami, you must be late, don't tiptoe in, just say, "Good morning, sorry I'm late", sit down, shut up and catch up.
 - ✓ The 'Leader' must be prepared prior to the scheduled start time; unprepared leadership loses the battle and maybe the war.
 - ✓ Start on time, do not honor last come first served, it's rude! Make me wait for tardy members, guess when I will arrive at the next meeting?
 - ✓ All documents and materials should be at each seat before the scheduled start time; assuming relevant reports and information was disseminated previously, meeting materials only support anticipated decisions of meeting agenda.
 - ✓ Do not discuss topics when no one present has decision authority regarding that issue; without the DM, it's just talk.
 - ✓ Each agenda item is assigned a specified time limit; a meeting longer than an hour is called a 'Workshop'. Limit the number of agenda items to allow a deserving amount of time for each item. The best meetings may have only one to three items for decision.
 - ✓ Stick to the pre-approved and pre-meeting issued agenda; want to ensure the waste of time and talent, allow the meeting to go off agenda, down some rabbit trail.
 - ✓ End on time, no matter what; running over time is disrespectful and a sign of poor meeting management. People look forward to your meetings if you guarantee them when the fat lady will sing.
- Conducting meetings is a requirement of leadership - a key competence in how to run a business successfully. Whether

you're the owner of the company, a manager or a team leader; if you want to really get good at being a successful leader, motivating others to higher performance, then you want to learn 'How To Meet Less and Achieve More' plus having everyone look forward to your meetings.

Implement these few pointers at your next meeting and see how the meeting flow / results improves.