



How To Make Meetings Count

By Valerie M. Plomin, PhD

As I began researching how much time the average business person spends on meetings in a given week, I was astounded by the statistics. So I kept checking. But, believe it or not, different sources concurred. Here is a summary of what I found:

- 25% – or 2 hours out of 8 – of an average business day is spent in meetings (1¼ days per week).
- For mid managers, that average moves up to 2 full days per week.
- For executives, it is 4 days per week.
- 50% of time spent in meetings is time wasted, meaning the average businessperson spends almost 1½ days a week wasting his or her time at meetings.

So how can we make more out of our meetings – and spend less time doing it?
Here are a few tips:

1. If you are the initiator of the meeting, ask yourself:
“What do I hope to accomplish with this meeting?”
“Is it *essential* that we meet, or could this information be obtained/ disseminated / discussed in a more efficient manner i.e. email, teleconference, webinar, memo?”
2. Prepare an agenda before you send out a meeting notice. Then look it over carefully to be certain that it contains only those items that require a face-to-face meeting. Also, if you are initiating the meeting, be able to state the purpose and goal of your meeting – and share this with invitees. If you have a lot of committees reporting at the meeting and/or a great deal of items that require votes, consider using a Consent Agenda (see #10).
3. Time out the agenda. Estimate approximately how much time each agenda item should require. Remember that each item will take longer if more people are in attendance and if the item will require discussion or is a “hot” topic.
4. If the meeting is longer than one hour, plan in breaks every 50 minutes. Also, realize that, after one hour, people’s attention span will diminish significantly.



5. Plan how you will limit discussion if an item goes beyond the time you have estimated for it. For instance, use a “parking lot.” This is a giant post-it where topics that need further discussion will be posted and dealt with at the end of the meeting. Make sure you allow 5-10 minutes at the end of your agenda to deal with these parking lot issues and/or set up another time for them to be discussed.
6. Decide who will be the timekeeper, if not you. Make sure everyone knows that you will be keeping to a schedule and using a parking lot.
7. Decide who will be taking minutes/notes. Indicate to those in attendance when and how they will receive a copy.
8. Distribute the agenda ahead of time along with any other expectations you have of those in attendance. The more informed everyone is, the more efficient your meeting. If you are planning to discuss very detailed material – like financials – make sure you send these materials with the agenda ahead of time so that attendees can preview the materials prior to the meeting. This should make your discussions more informed and productive.
9. When you send out the agenda, you should also indicate starting and finishing times for your meeting. Then be prepared to stick to it!
10. Consider using a Consent Agenda. Start out by asking that all reports be submitted at least one week prior to the meeting. Send out the reports to each participant at least one week before the meeting and ask each participant to review the reports and bring questions regarding the reports to the meeting. Then, at the meeting, introduce each report and call for questions and/or discussion. After all the reports have been introduced and questions answered, call for one vote on all the reports. This maximizes time spent on routines such as committee reporting and allows for more valuable time that can now be used to discuss action items.