

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Everyday Meetings

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Welcome

The stakes and visibility are high for large meetings. However, the reality is that most of us spend lots of time in everyday business meetings. This issue is dedicated to ideas for improving the mundane meeting

If you don't have too many New Year's Resolutions for 2003, add improving the mundane meeting to your list. Wishing you more productivity and a Happy New Year in 2003!

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

- P.S. I really could use your help. I am conducting a quick survey. If you haven't seen it in a separate email or if you haven't yet responded, please see "Your Thoughts". [7 Quick Questions and my Thanks! Survey](#)

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Not Only the BIG Fish

Hey, its just a meeting. Why should we focus on improving small, everyday, mundane meetings? Aren't we only interested in catching the BIG fish?

The everyday, mundane meeting is important.

Reason #1: Regular meetings control the organization's performance and culture.

"Regular meetings always display, affirm and exercise the organization's values,

structures and roles – so they are also the primary means by which the organization perpetuates its culture”, states William Daniels in his book, [Group Power II: A Manager's Guide to Conducting Regular Meetings](#)

Reason #2: Ordinary Meetings waste time, lots of time

By one estimate, the average executive spends 17 hours a week in meetings. (Source Allan Cox)

The Wharton Center for Applied Research found that excluding preparation time, senior executives spend 23 hours a week in meetings but consider only 58% of that time effectively spent.

Burket Marketing Research reports someone earning \$50,000 accrues \$20,621 of that amount sitting in meetings.

Reason #3: Bad meetings wear on your soul

Ineffective everyday meetings are a source of negative energy. Can you hear the complaining (often warranted) tone of voice behind this comment, "I have to go to another meeting....."?

Here are some common complaints:

- My presence not needed
- Too Long
- Too many people
- Leader had predetermined solution
- Trivial matters discussed; irrelevant discussions
- No priority regarding how to spend time
- No tangible outcomes

Marlene Caroselli lists more reasons people dislike meetings in her book [Meetings that Work](#).

All these legitimate complaints affect the performance of the organization (Reason #1 above), affect the overall culture (Reason #1 above) and also demotivate employees, the third reason to focus on the small meetings.

Everyday Habits

Like flossing, establishing good daily habits for the everyday meeting will serve your "business" health and career well.

Habit 1: Determine if you need a meeting by asking the following questions:

1. Do you need to generate enthusiasm for a new idea or product?
2. Would the lack of distraction save time and money?
3. Does the issue need multiple perspectives?
4. Is it a complex topic?
5. Are you trying to create or motivate a team?
6. Are you trying to resolve a customer problem or need?
7. Are you trying to create a new way of the organization to do its work?
8. Are you trying to solve a systemic business problem?

If the answer to these questions is a "yes", have a meeting. Otherwise, use an alternative way of communicating (memo, email, phone call) to deal with the issue at hand.

Habit 2: Set standards and communicate them

This habit works well for managing people and being a good parent! You must communicate expectations if you expect them to be followed. The other piece to this habit is the concept of consequences. Time outs work well in parenting. In business, people pay attention to either what is measured (what management cares about) and what affects their paycheck/performance review. Set a good example and if that doesn't work, put some teeth behind this habit.

Tandem Computers created The Meeting Manifesto, a poster hung in every meeting room. The poster offers tidbits about effective meetings. For example: Arrive on Time, Meeting must start and end on time, Leaders must stick to the agenda. Also included on the Manifesto: The meeting must be necessary, the objective clear and the right people present.

The Manifesto was also inserted in the company newsletter with a pledge from company executives to contribute to good meeting management.

Habit 3: Give people the tools and skills necessary to run effective meetings.

There are many great books out there. (See Winter Reading.) Or borrow from one of the many "models" for keeping meeting skills top of mind.

This is the PATIO Model:

Purpose – Have a clearly defined purpose

Agenda – Have a defined agenda, distributed to participants before the meeting

Time Limit – Start and end time

I nformation - Work before the meeting to make the session effective

O bjectives - Pinpoint the objectives you hope to achieve for each item on the agenda

Mundane to Magnificent and Marvelous

Want to create meetings that move from mundane to [Magnificent](#) and [Marvelous](#).

Here are three slices of the meeting to give you some ideas

Before the Meeting

If you have decided a meeting is the "way", then the next step is to clarify your objectives and desired outcomes. This is not to suggest that the outcomes are pre-determined only that the purpose of the meeting is clear in your mind. Then you can decide who should attend, select the location and then the fun part -- how to structure the meeting to be most effective.

With a clearly identified purpose, form will follow function. Set up the meeting so it supports your desired outcomes.

Here are some objectives of everyday meetings:

- Share Information
- Generate Ideas
- Delegate
- Share Work
- Plan
- Coordinate
- Persuade, Involve or Inspire
- Maintain Relationships
- Celebrate
- Decide on Issues

Think about the idea of form following function. If you are having a meeting to make decisions, set up the agenda in such a way to support a decision making mode.

For example, specify on the agenda which items are for information sharing and which are for information processing.

The difference: Information sharing items are those for which only points of clarification are allowed.

Information processing items allow discussion, analysis, decision-making and planning.

This change in the agenda will set behavioral expectations for the group and minimize time wasted.

Or another idea: Use action verbs on your agendas. Instead of posting topics

Topical Agenda

Project X
Report Y
Testing Plan

Use verbs in the agenda like "Examine" "Discuss" "Review" "Approve" "List"

Verb-Spurred Agenda

Decide on Project X
Review Report Y
Approve Testing Plan

I read about the Verb-Spurred agenda in Burt Albert's [Fat Free Meetings](#). I also like his suggestions on the Meeting Kit, the Twinge Test (to determine if you need a meeting), and finally I like his description of meeting roles.

Now if instead you are holding a meeting to share information offer your participants a structure or procedure. This can be done with some flair and fun! For example:

Stop/Start/Alerts Agendas

This procedure allows people to share news in a quick, participatory manner. It is well suited for sharing "news" types of meetings

Each member of the group reports on:

Starts – What is new or proceeding in altered ways
Stops – What is completed or is discontinued
Alerts- What problems or opportunities may be coming up

Or try this format

Highlights/Lowlights

Again, this procedure invites participation and is well suited for meetings where the agenda items are "sharing of information" without any deliberation.

Highlights are significant accomplishments or good news worth notice
Lowlights are problem, failures or significantly bad news worth sharing as a warning or as a learning opportunity.

Each member should share at least one highlight and lowlights and no member should pass.

During the Meeting

Even with a good purpose, a meeting can still be de-railed. There are many potential reasons for this:

- Loss of focus

- Problem personalities
- Lack of preparation (participants or leader)

In my limited space available, I wanted to offer a thought on group discussions and decision making.

Picture a meeting room with a group of professionals, each with vastly different experiences, values, opinions and beliefs trying to reach agreement. In this typical scenario, often meetings discussions go awry because of 2 unspoken dynamics:

1. The discussion does not differentiate between opinion and fact.

Opinions are easy to express because they are based on preconceived ideas and beliefs. Facts come from external sources or experiences and require some research or knowledge.

People's opinions should be known. The meeting facilitator should encourage people to express their opinion on the subject. Then once everyone's position is known, restrict the remainder of the discussion to factual statements only.

To speed up decision-making, ask people to argue using facts only. Without opinions getting in the way, you'll arrive at consensus and make decisions much more quickly.

2. People view conflict and disagreement as the same thing.

Disagreements are healthy in an organization. They force the group to consider different options and select the most viable course of action.

Conflict, however, has an emotional component. When people form an emotional attachment to a certain issue, stance or strategy, it is very difficult for them to back down from that position. It is also much harder to reach resolution if someone is emotionally attached to a specific outcome

Encourage disagreement but limit conflict by avoiding personal comments, character attacks and underhanded maneuvering.

The End

Its not over until its over. A meeting is not over when all the items on the agenda have been discussed. The meeting is only one part of the process. Additional action follows a meeting's close.

Ideally, a meeting should end with the 4 C's Charles Hawkins identifies in his book, [First Aid for Meetings: Quick Fixes](#):

Consensus - Reaching win/win solutions and decisions by consensus

Closure - Clear action steps, timetables and responsibilities

Critique and Celebration - Assessment of the meeting's effectiveness and acknowledgement of individual contributions

Communication- Concise summary of meeting with a follow-up system to keep projects on track

Not on the Usual Agenda

Here are some ideas that are not on everyone's agenda. Despite the fact that some are a bit off the wall, you should (appropriately) try them:

1. Conduct the meeting standing up. Meeting times are cut by 34% where participants stand up.
2. Invite participants in for their specific sections of the agenda.
3. At regular staff meetings, allow different people to host the meeting. This gives people the opportunity to practice meeting skills and creates more interest and buy-in.
4. Assign Roles. If you are running the meeting, it may be too much to ask for you to the timekeeper, the facilitator, the scribe, surrogate customer, or devil's advocate and still focus on the agenda. The meeting leader should delegate tasks to others in the meeting to help the overall efficiency of the meeting.

Often too meetings are less than effective when the leader who may also be the boss also acts as the facilitator. Meeting leaders often have a vested interest in the outcome. It can be difficult to remain neutral and objective as required in the role as meeting facilitator. Moreover, an impassioned meeting leader/boss /facilitator can squash input and ideas from other meeting participants.

5. Limit meetings to 30 minutes or less. This forces people to come prepared and it puts pressure on everyone to focus. Finally, everyone can leave the meeting and get back to their "real jobs."
6. Borrow a "perspective" from Edward de Bono. De Bono is a creativity guru and his book [Six Thinking Hats](#) encourages people to adopt a certain perspective in a meeting. The meeting leader will ask people to don (figuratively) a blue hat, and everyone's contribution will be directed toward a blue sky perspective. Conversely, during the meeting, people will be asked to take a black hat perspective and serve to point out the weaknesses of an idea. Beyond serving as the Devil's Advocate in Black Hat thinking, De Bono offers Green, Yellow, Red and White Hat thinking perspectives in his book.

Your Thoughts

I hope this newsletter will spur some ideas for your everyday meeting. This is a topic I am quite passionate about and I am pleased that I will be presenting, 180+ Ways to Transform your Meetings at Meeting Professionals International's Professional Education Congress on Monday, February 3 at 8:30 am.

In advance of the seminar, I am conducting a short 7 question survey on the topic of innovative meetings. The survey is open to anyone involved in meetings.

If you are involved in planning meetings, click here to take the survey [PEC Planner Survey](http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite/Surveys/PECPlanners) or cut and paste this URL into your browser:
<http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite/Surveys/PECPlanners>

As a small thank you, I will be glad to share the results with you following the PEC.

I am also interested in the opinions of others who support meetings. If you are a vendors or supplier, I also value your opinion, as I personally believe, we all have a role to play in improving meetings. Here is the link to the that version: [PEC Supplier Survey](http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite/Surveys/PECSupplier)
The URL is: <http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite/Surveys/PECSupplier>

Please feel free to pass along the survey URL to anyone else involved in meetings.

Thanks!

Winter Reading

Everyday Meeting Reading Suggestions:

[How to Hold Successful Meetings](#) by Paul Timm I like Timm's explanation of groupthink and how to avoid it. I also like his forms to evaluate meetings.

[How to Make Meetings Work](#) by Michael Doyle and David Strauss

[How to Win the Meeting](#) by Frank Snell This is more of a personal development book that addresses political maneuvering at meetings. I have it on my list because he offers a very interesting perspective on persuasion through his persuasion circle model.

[I Hate Meetings](#) by Stephen Baker with drawing by Arnie Levin of the New Yorker This is when you need some humor.

[Little Black Book of Business Meetings](#)
by Michael Thomsett I like his myths about communication.

[Making Meetings Work](#) by John Tropman

[Mastering Meetings](#) b by Jeannine Drew

[Meetings That Work!: A Practical Guide to Shorter and More Productive Meetings](#) by Richard Chang and Kevin Kehoe

[Not Another Meeting: A Practical Guide for Facilitating Effective Meetings](#) by Frances Micale

[Running a Meeting That Works](#) by Robert Miller and Marilyn Pincus I liked the sections on getting the most from a group, collateral materials and (Chapter 11) on outside speakers.

[We've Got to Start Meeting Like This](#)
by Robert Mosvick and Robert Nelson I appreciated the review of the technology tools

(ever changing 6 years later) but the lessons are still valuable and the authors provide a great review of various meeting formats/groups like Single Question Format, Brainstorming, Synergetics, Buzz groups, etc.

[Zen of Groups: A Handbook for People Meeting With a Purpose](#) by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey, and Bill Taylor

Humor & Freebies

FREEBIE

Are the people planning and running everyday meetings skilled and prepared? Offer this fee quiz to anyone in your organization to get them to focus on planning marvelous everyday meetings.

If you are interested in receiving the quiz, please email me. Just send a blank e-mail to Stinnish@ameritech.net [Meeting Quiz](#)

Humor

The best meeting in town is a group of three with one person sick and the other out of town.

Scott Adams, creator of Dilbert, recommends having meetings in "voice activated chairs that heat up about 10 degrees for every minute" that a person talks. So on a cold day, "if you can say your point in a minute or two, you'll get a nice warm chair...But if you keep rambling on, you'll be incinerated."

"Purgatory is a meeting that goes off on a tangent. Hell is a meeting that ends there."
Professor Jack Pintney of Claremont McKenna College

Future T.I.M.E.

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events will be accepting limited advertising. If you are interested in using this e-newsletter as a way to reach a targeted audience, please e-mail Ron Hopkins at rhopkins@ameritech.net for more details. [Or Click Here](#)

I will be speaking at Meeting Professional International's Professional Education Congress on February 3. Steve Kemble and I are also hosting the Conference Orientation on Sunday for all first time attendees or new MPI members. I hope to see some familiar faces in the audience.

I'd love to work with you on creating more interaction for your meeting or event. Please contact me: Sue Tinnish, SEAL Inc., Telephone: 847.394.9857, E-mail: stinnish@ameritech.net [Contact Sue](#)

In the meantime, I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: [Teambuilding](#) and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: [Green Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: [Values](#) and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: [Minimum/Minimal Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: [Evaluations](#) and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: [Politics](#)

December 2000: [Toys](#) and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: [Sales, Award Presentations](#) and (Freebie) Sales Tips

February 2001: [Change](#) and Communicating Change and (Freebie) Change Bombs

March 2001: [Open Space Technology](#)

April 2001: [Adult Learning Styles](#) and (Freebie) Learning Style Questionnaire

May 2001: [Trade Shows](#) and (Freebie) Trade Show Timeline

June 2001: [Emotional Intelligence](#) and (Freebie) EI Quiz

July 2001: [Presentation Tips](#) and (Freebie) Speaker Introductions

August 2001: [Ice Breakers](#) and (Freebie) Resource List

September 2001: [Facilitation](#) and (Freebie) Problem Personalities In A Meeting

October 2001: [Humor](#) and (Freebie) The Benefits Of Laughter

November 2001: [Customer Care](#) and (Freebie) Complaints

December 2001: [Slack](#) and (Freebie) Quiet Time

January 2002: [Teambuilding Options](#) and (Freebie)

February 2002: [Promotional Products](#) and (Freebie) Case Study

March 2002: [Multicultural Communication](#) and (Freebie) Multicultural Meeting Tips

April 2002: [Outdoor Learning](#) and (Freebie) Justification Checklist

May 2002: [Budgets, ROI, ROO, and ROK](#) and (Freebie) Budgeting Beyond Excel

June 2002: [Creativity](#) and (Freebie) Building the Case for Creativity

July 2002: [High Touch Technology](#) and (Freebie) Personal Technology Tools

August 2002: [Economic and Business Cycles](#) and (Freebie) Investment Strategies for meetings

September 2002: [Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers](#) and (Freebie) Learning Environments

October 2002: [Return on Investment](#) and (Freebie) Balanced Scorecard

November 2002: [Incentive Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Forum Synopsis

December 2002: [Resource Recap](#) and (Freebie) Resource Lists

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