

MODERN MEETING MANAGEMENT

8 Questions to Guarantee a Productive Meeting
...Without Driving Your Team Insane



by **WILLY STEINER**

INTRODUCTION

Many of the senior leaders that I serve consistently complain about the **volume of meetings they are asked to attend** on a regular basis. For many, a day can be consumed by one meeting after the other so that there is actually very little time for their real work.

Now don't get me wrong, there's a lot of work that goes on in meetings and they do have the potential to be very valuable sources for organizational accomplishment.

I often observe my clients in meeting settings to provide them some feedback on their leadership and communication styles. When I broaden my focus to what is actually going on with most participants, here are a few general observations:

continued on p.2

INTRODUCTION (cont.)

- In many status meetings **people don't pay attention** to what's going on unless they are speaking or preparing to speak.
- It's not uncommon to see members of a management team **answering email or texts** on either their laptop, tablet or phone while others are speaking.
- Meetings are usually scheduled in one hour increments one right after the other. When do people have time to go to the bathroom, or check their phone for calls and emails **without impacting the next meeting** they're attending?
- It's not unusual for people to show up anywhere from **5 to 15 to 20 minutes late**. Either everyone else's time is wasted by getting them up to speed, or the people that are late just never really know what happened.
- If there are 10 people in a meeting and you asked all 10 what was accomplished in that meeting, **how many different answers would you hear?**

WHAT THE SURVEY RESULTS SAY

Last year I surveyed 10 members of a **Leadership Learning Lab** team about their meeting management experience.

These individuals were very senior technical leaders, most of whom had master's degrees from some of the better technical universities in the country. These were highly influential individuals in their organization, as well as their industry.

In our very first meeting, after we had been together about three hours, several key issues bubbled up and **their general level of frustration was very high.**

A key concern they had was that **their days were consumed by one meeting after the other** and their time for planning, preparation, relationship building and just plain reflection, was only available to them after hours. They were frustrated and burned out... an organizational norm they felt powerless to challenge.

WHAT THE SURVEY RESULTS SAY (cont.)

On my next visit I asked each of the 10 members to complete a short survey about their meeting experience. Here are some of the key takeaways:

- They averaged **6.5 meetings a day**, approximately **50 minutes long each**.
- **25% of meetings** had no visible or appointed leader and **40% had no clear purpose**, much less an agenda.
- They failed to allocate enough time to the most important topics during **60% of their meetings**.
- Next steps were clearly articulated **only 34% of the time**.
- When asked how much more productive they could be if meetings were run better, the answer was **31% more productive**. *(They were limited to no more than 50%, as it assumed the other 50% was reasonably productive.)*

WHAT THE SURVEY RESULTS SAY (cont.)

As I mentioned before, each of these participants were highly skilled, well educated and very influential in their organization.

Each had a compensation package of salary, bonus, long-term incentives and benefits that **exceeded well over \$200,000 per year**, and that's a somewhat conservative figure.

If you considered that a potentially 31% improvement in productivity was possible just for these 10 technical leaders, that could mean that their organization would reap a benefit of **over \$600,000 per year** if meetings were improved.

...and that's only for **10 people out of over 50,000!**

8 KEY QUESTIONS

I'm sure that each of you reading this could supply your own horror stories about meetings that were poorly run, ineffective and a complete waste of time.

The reality is that the way organizations come to cope with these very weak standards for meeting effectiveness is **a reflection of organizational culture**, and even very healthy organizations who are very proud of their culture **will tolerate poor behavior in meetings**.

The reasons for that are rather complex, so let's just zero in on a few key **meeting management expectations** that you should insist upon for any meeting that you either lead or can influence.

The 8 key questions you should answer before and during any meeting are:

continued on p.7

8 KEY QUESTIONS (cont.)

1

WHO is responsible for the effectiveness of this meeting?

2

WHY are we here?

3

WHAT do we need to accomplish in the time we have?

8 KEY QUESTIONS (cont.)

4

WHAT would a good outcome look like?

5

HOW will we keep ourselves on task?

6

HOW do we avoid tangents and distractions?

8 KEY QUESTIONS (cont.)

7

WHO does WHAT next... and WHERE can we find the summary of this meeting?

8

WHEN do we need to follow up... or do we?

8 KEY QUESTIONS (cont.)

I would also suggest that you institute **25 minute and 50 minute long meetings** and have someone call out when there are 10 and 5 minutes left to go in each meeting to ensure prompt wrap up times.

It is my firm belief that if the leader of any meeting stays true to ensuring that these questions – the **who, what, why, where, when** and **how** - of meeting management get answered, you will greatly increase the productivity and satisfaction of each member of the team.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Before you move on, ask yourself:

- If you're frustrated enough about all the time you waste in meetings, are you willing to do something about it?
- Are you worried about what others would say if you instituted these modest changes in the meetings that you run or lead?
- If you're frustrated and not worried about what others might say, why don't you start tomorrow?

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Please feel free to contact me any time at coachwilly@executivecoachingconcepts.com.

Also, I hope to see your opinions, questions and insights in the Comments section of my blog posts at the [Coach's Corner Blog](#).

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