

Meetings, 4 Ways to Improve

Meetings. They were romantic notions at some distant point in my past. Boy! I can't wait until *I'm* important enough to attend meetings, to *lead* meetings. That'll be the day! Ever have a similar thought yourself? Ever<g>?

Then, somehow, reality found you, captured you, and enveloped you. Guess what? You've found yourself the *victim* of meetings. The silly things that seem like they're designed to waste your precious time, ways of being 'busy' yet not accomplishing a darned thing. And, not even the least bit romantic.

Problem is, if you're in the corporate world, I think a lot of this comes down to having had someone teach us, mentor us, on what a meeting should be like. Meetings are (or should be) important events. They're invaluable for the face-to-face time we need, for getting a group of people to communicate in one time, in one place, what they're thinking. What they're agreeing to. At least that's the notion.

In the *vast* majority of cases, meetings are ineffective because their time lines aren't adhered to; they're unstructured; and, the agenda's unclear. Worse, action items are undocumented and easily sloughed off after the fact. Finally, most are just *too long*.

A few thoughts:

- Keep meetings focused, have an agenda.
- Schedule them for as long as you *need*. Just because your calendaring tool's defaults to 60 minute increments, doesn't mean your meeting needs to be.
- Use oddball start times. Two reasons:
 - One, people often remember them...*because...they're* unusual times.
 - More important, if someone's been in a prior meeting of 60 or (ugh) 120 minutes, they're *going* to need to refresh themselves. Be kind, be considerate, give them 10 or 15 minutes past the hour before coming to *your* meeting. They're going to do it anyway, so why not save everyone the grief of incessantly late starts?
- Be flexible. If you don't need to meet this week, then don't.

Colleagues know I'm not perfect in running my own meetings. There's *always* room for improvement. But following even a couple of these ideas may well give you above average performance.

I'd *love* to hear a few of your own examples, case studies, and the like. It's a great topic and likely one we can all benefit from thinking about.