

Ken Moore Associates

Presents

**PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS**

In my seminars on management development and leadership, I usually include a segment on how to conduct productive meetings. I have also whimsically entitled it “How To Waste Everyone’s Time Except The Chairman’s”. Now I have always been of the opinion that most official and obligatory meetings requiring the presence of three or more people are much like lawsuits & general surgery. Both should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

After having taught this subject to over 2,500 middle and senior level managers, I have been impressed by the commonality of complaints about poorly run meetings. I have equally been impressed with the commonality of praises regarding well-run meetings. Here are some of the complaints that managers have stated:

- a. The meeting was too long;
- b. 90% of the subject matter was irrelevant to me;
- c. The room was too stuffy, too hot, too cold, etc;
- d. Someone hogged the floor and monopolized the discussion with minutiae;
- e. Nothing was accomplished;
- f. We spent half an hour discussing the weekend football games and 10 minutes on business;
- g. Too much time was spent on unimportant business;
- h. The electronic link-up was unsatisfactory – couldn’t hear or see the presentation very well;
- i. There was no logical reason to have this meeting other than because we always have this meeting at the same time every day/week/month;
- j. The chairman and/or the participants were unprepared for the meeting;
- k. Most of the subjects discussed could have been handled without a meeting;
- l. There were no donuts or coffee;

On the other side, here are some of the positive comments that the managers had about some of the meetings they had attended:

- a. The chairman and the participants were well prepared;
- b. The chairman stuck to the agenda;
- c. It was well run;
- d. It was short and to the point;
- e. It was well-structured and controlled;
- f. The meeting had a specific purpose and its objective was achieved;
- g. Only topics of interest and relevance to the participants were discussed;
- h. The meeting was called only when something had to be decided or discussed;
- i. There were plenty of donuts, coffee & soda available;

With such uncommon amount of agreement among the participants, it became relatively easy to offer some solutions for conducting more productive meetings, if you must have them. It only requires a chairman who doesn’t see this meeting as an ego boost or to meet just for the sake of meeting.

*First*, once you have decided that there is no alternative but to hold a meeting, then you must **become crystal clear on the objective of the meeting**. Write down on a piece of paper what you want to discuss and what you hope to achieve from the discussion. Ask yourself two basic questions: 1) what is it that I hope to achieve with this meeting, and 2) what would be the consequence of not holding this meeting. More than a few of the managers in my seminars have indicated that the weekly manager’s meeting or the division head’s meetings are the most frequently abused time wasters. They usually exist out of habit or tradition and often fail to justify their existence. Because they do occur every week, the participants settle into the same routine with little thought as to the content or conduct of the meeting.

***Second, prepare a logical sequence of items to discuss, and place a time limit on each item. This sequence is usually called an agenda, but you must be careful that it does not become just a crib sheet for the chairman. It is a detailed brief from which all others work. It will define the subject area, the amount of time allowed for the discussion, and the objective of the discussion. It can also list the major topics in the subject area that are relevant to the objective. Keep in mind that the amount of time spent on a subject should be determined by its importance, not its urgency.***

***Third, invite only those people who can contribute to the objectives of the discussion. Let them know as far in advance as possible what is being discussed, why it is being discussed and what you hope to achieve from the discussion. As chairman of the meeting, you must anticipate the needs of the participants as well as their own time constraints and insure that they are met. You must also inform the people precisely what they are expected to contribute.***

***Fourth, insure that the meeting is formly structured and controlled. Since we are not talking about a free-wheeling brain storming type of meeting where just about anything goes, a good chair person will allow the discussion to follow five basic steps:***

- a. State the proposition(s) clearly and concisely in terms that everyone will understand;
- b. Produce the evidence or information that is germane to the subject;
- c. Have structured discussions about what the information proves or posits;
- d. Come to a conclusion upon which the majority is in agreement;
- e. Decide upon the action;

***Fifth, the chairperson or his/her designee must summarize and record the discussion in writing. If any action is taken, include the name of the person responsible and the time frame within which the action is to be completed. Insure that all participants receive a copy of this report;***

Finally, when all these steps are taken and you still find yourself bogged down by trivial items, consider the advice given by Robert Townsend, the late chairman of Avis and author of "Up The Organization" on how to keep meetings on schedule and to the point. He suggests that you have all of the participants stand up for the duration!

Word Count: 947