

~~Abolish meetings~~

Manage meetings

People don't hate meetings.

We say we do. We grouse about having to go to them (unless we called the meeting, and sometimes even then). But, in fact, meetings are important, and most folks know it, at least on some level. As a coach and manager, it's up to you to make sure meetings serve the purposes for which they are called. For example,

- Meetings provide a social component in a workplace where employees are increasingly isolated, in their cubicles, at their computers.
- Meetings ensure everyone hears the same thing at the same time, a much-more reliable way to communicate than via that notorious grapevine.
- Most important, meetings allow for interaction—questions, clarifications, discussion, an opportunity to solve problems and reach a consensus.

No, it isn't meetings folks hate; they hate bad meetings.

They hate being subjected to nonsense. They hate wasting their time. They hate listening to someone read a list of announcements to them, when they could have read them (selectively, skipping what didn't apply to them) much faster for themselves.

And employees really loathe spending their precious time discussing an issue that matters to them, only to find out that a decision has already been made.

Run your meetings tightly. An effective agenda includes not only the topics for discussion, but also the time allotted for each discussion. Keep the discussion moving, making sure to recognize employees who are less aggressive about getting their opinions in. If you aren't the best person to run the meeting, delegate that responsibility to the one who is.

When planning that meeting, keep these three guidelines in mind:

Hold meetings only when necessary: If you merely need to announce information, perhaps a memo, an e-mail, or a web site post will do. Save meetings for meaningful interactions.

Plan every meeting carefully: Don't plan only the topics to cover and the best order to cover them in, but also the environment you want for the discussion.

Circulate discussion items and necessary information ahead of time: Let workers know what's expected of them at the meeting. ("Please read this over and come with your comments.")

"Get them out on time. If you promised an hour, keep it to an hour."