



Robby Slaughter

Making Meetings Work for You and Your Business

Chances are pretty good you went to a meeting this week. And, you probably felt that at least part of that meeting was a waste of your time.

If that sounds familiar, you're not alone. According to effectivemeetings.com, the typical professional attends more than sixty meetings a month and reports that half of meeting time is wasted. With 11 million meetings occurring in the

make a decision. There used to be a third reason to hold a recurring meeting: to make announcements. This function is now obsolete thanks to a 4,000 year-old invention called writing.

Verbal announcements at routine meetings are the single largest source of wasted time. An announcement isn't the start of a discussion, it's not up for debate, nor is it meant to inspire or

routine meeting without an agenda. Secondly, the meeting must have a written summary. The other reason meetings waste our time is a lack of accountability.

An old adage maintains "talk is cheap." A summary captures all of the ideas and decisions made during the meeting. Assigned tasks or next steps are distributed to the appropriate stakeholders. People who were not at the meeting can read

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U.S. every day, we are losing hours of productivity sitting in offices and conference rooms.

It's tempting to abandon meetings altogether, but there are reasons to meet. People can achieve more by working as a team. Companies, nonprofits and community organizations should be meeting. What we need is a better model.

Meeting Types

There are two kinds of meetings: those which are routine and those which are called in response to a crisis. We can't do much about the latter because we can't predict the future. However, regular meetings can be improved tremendously by making them more effective, more engaging, and more productive.

Let's acknowledge that there are really only two possible reasons to have a routine meeting: to brainstorm ideas or to

educate. Announcements are just facts. Send them in an email so they can actually be tracked by the recipient—instead of speaking aloud and hoping people remember the details.

By eliminating routine announcements from meetings, we can focus just on the two categories of tasks: brainstorming ideas or making decisions. But to do this, meeting organizers should document what will occur and what was completed. This first is called an agenda and the second is called a summary.

Getting Organized

Without an agenda, meetings are basically social engagements. There's no reason to show up except to see people you know, there's no knowing what will actually happen and there's no clear start or end. A written agenda allows participants to prepare for a meeting and to decide if they even need to be involved. A written agenda also ensures that meetings have a clear purpose. Never hold a

the summary to find out what happened. A meeting summary document helps to ensure that the meeting has real value and people carry out assigned work.

If meetings are taking up too much time in your business, volunteer organization or elsewhere in your professional life, make these changes. Require that meetings have agendas and that they be documented with a meeting summary. Eliminate announcements from meetings and move them to email or other publications. And if you're just someone attending meetings, not organizing them, ask if you can help make meetings better. Call a meeting to discuss ideas, and use that meeting to demonstrate to others a smarter way to work.

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