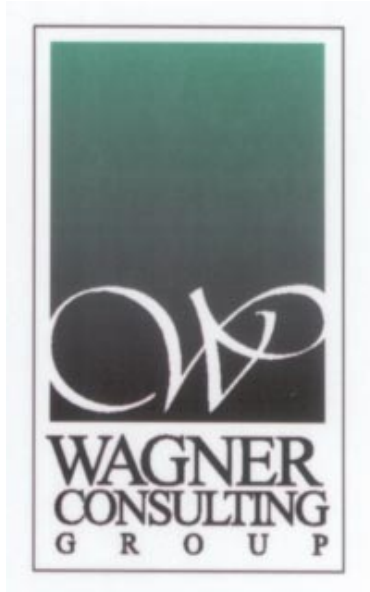




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JUL 2004

VOL. VII, NO. 1

Mastering Meetings - I

Death by Meeting. That's the title of Patrick Lencioni's most recent book, and it captures the feelings of many managers. Paradoxically, Lencioni prescribes *more* meetings.

I read the book thinking, "Anyone brave enough to recommend more meetings must be onto something, or crazy." Lencioni is not crazy, and succinctly lays out a meeting strategy adaptable to many situations. I value clarity of thought and simple solutions, and discovered both in his book. Moreover, I reflected on my work with clients and many meetings during my years in the corporate world. So, with attribution to Mr. Lencioni, I offer the following concepts to help you master your meetings.

First, if you are a manager or leader, meetings are a vital part of your job. *This is important: Understand the opportunity and accept the responsibility to improve results through appropriate use of meetings.* Before you bemoan time spent meeting, honestly evaluate all the time-wasters in your routine. Effective use of meetings will actually save time and help prevent miscues. Fewer miscues = less rework.

Second, the reason meetings often fail to produce good results is the lack of a *Contextual Structure*. Discussing long-range strategic issues one moment and tomorrow's production plans the next dilutes the focus on both. Add a lack of individual accountability to this muddle and you have a sure-fire recipe for wasting time.

Four types of meetings will handle most business situations.

1. Team Huddles lasting 5 minutes or less help communicate the key factors influencing a day's activities. Carried out standing up.
2. Weekly Tactical meetings lasting 30 to 60 minutes cover short interval planning and coordination. No advance agenda.
3. Strategic Meetings address Big Picture topics that arise in weekly meetings or elsewhere, and should be scheduled every one or two months. A specific - and limited - agenda allows participants to prepare for the meeting. A typical meeting lasts about two hours, but allow time flexibility so important topics can be fleshed out. Hold ad hoc strategic meetings to decide urgent issues.
4. Annual or semi-annual retreats provide an atmosphere to define major goals, evaluate progress in critical areas, and engage in "star gazing" and other long term planning. Include an overnight stay to encourage informal discussions and allow participants to literally "sleep on it."

Tom Wagner

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