



Focus

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Mastering Meetings

“If I didn’t have to go to meetings, I’d like my job a lot more.”

From *Death by Meeting* by Pat Lencioni

Love ‘em or hate ‘em, meetings are a key management role. Typically, the more senior the position, the more time spent meeting. If you want to improve the quality of your “meeting life,” consider this. Managers often complain about too many meetings, but usually the problem is **not** too many meetings. The problem is ineffective, boring meetings, and sometimes *too few* meetings.

The first key to mastering meetings is to match the meeting length, format, and topics to the situation. Whatever type of meeting, consider these tips for a good meeting.

Drama. *Yes, drama is good!* Too many managers go to great lengths to avoid drama when that’s exactly what’s needed to keep our attention and generate good ideas. Use the following techniques to add *appropriate* drama to your meetings.

- o No one who has seen the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* will forget the dramatic opening scene; that movie had our attention immediately. This same technique works with a meeting. Begin with a crisp 90-second launch phase, including a “hook” to grab attention.
 - § *People, we’re faced with a serious problem and if we can’t solve this in the next 90 days then . . .*
 - § *Folks, I want to tell you about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that could . . .*
- o Mine for conflict of ideas. Just as in a good movie, conflict is necessary for an interesting meeting.
 - § *Fred, I’m sensing there’s a problem with Tom’s priorities that people are uncomfortable discussing. If there is a problem, then we need find a solution before things get worse.*
- o Use real-time permission to encourage unfiltered ideological debate.
 - § *Joe, before I bring up my next point I want you to know this is not meant as criticism of you . . .*

Contextual structure

- o Avoid “meeting stew” when a collection of random issues are discussed
- o Follow the four meeting format: Daily check-in, weekly tactical, monthly strategic, and quarterly off-site review

Prioritize: Discuss the most important items first

- o Begin weekly tactical meetings with a quick review of key metrics, and then carry out a Lightning Round where each participant has 60 seconds to state his or her top concerns. **Then** set the agenda with the most important items first and allocate discussion time accordingly.

Use meetings to explore alternatives and make decisions, **not** to share information that can be otherwise disseminated.

- o Distribute well in advance (not the day before!) pre-reading, and expect participants to have become familiar with the salient points
- o Be disciplined in thought and action
- o Monthly or other strategic meetings should begin with an agenda summary that covers:
 - § What vital issues we’ll discuss
 - § What choices we’ll encounter
 - § What, if any, decisions we’ll be expected to make

Defining at the meeting Kickoff phase any important decisions helps participants focus and process information more effectively. Think of this as a meeting roadmap. Decision-making made along the journey is much easier when you know your destination.

Tom Wagner

About the photo:

That's 3 generations of Wagner men captured during Christmas 2010.
A multi-generational picture seems appropriate since I deal in succession planning.

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