

group—that the very mix of the agenda invites frustration and inattention.

Time Allotment

- *Reality*

This is tough. The sense of time we all have is related to what the number—5 minutes, 2 minutes—*looks* like it allows rather than a true sense of the amount of time that number actually is worth.

One way to get better at this is to time discussions at meetings, presentations, TV news pieces, commercials, etc., with a stopwatch to discover exactly how much can be said in a *very* short space of time. You can also discover it by reading aloud from this page to see how far you get in ten seconds, thirty seconds, two minutes (it will surprise you). This will give you a better sense of how much time is needed to make X number of points. It will help you set realistic (and shorter) time allotments for the items on your agenda. Try timing actual meeting segments as well.

- *Total time*

Aside from the considerations of how much time you need to cover the material, think of how people will respond to the total time for the meeting. We get bored faster than fast these days, plus: You've taken people from their daily tasks. They begin to watch the time disappear and think about their tasks piling up. One and a half, maybe two hours maximum is my suggestion unless the meeting is designed as a total immersion brainstorming session, in which case breaks of fifteen to twenty minutes several times a day become necessary.

Input from Others

To make people feel represented as you create your agenda, send a memo around, when possible and appropriate, announcing the meeting (start and probable finish time, place, date), telling what your main items will be, and what they need to prepare. Then ask if they have any other items they want to have considered. The benefits are:

- You start making your meeting truly participatory.
- You get others interested in the meeting before it happens and they are better contributors when they get there.
- You have told them what you want to talk about and what to prepare for, so they feel more comfortable, with less surprises.