Title:
5 Hidden Traps in Meetings

Word Count:
605

Summary:
People who take meetings for granted risk being a victim of a trap. Here they
are and how to avoid them.

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Article Body:
If you have sat through a few bad meetings, you must have experienced the
following traps. Here they are and how to fix them.

1) People think they are experts.

Many people tell me that they know how to hold a meeting. Actually, all they do
is host a party. They invite guests, provide treats, and preside over a
conversation. People talk. People eat. And nothing happens. Or, if they somehow
manage to reach an agreement, no one implements it.

> What to do: Learn how to lead a real meeting. Schedule a workshop or buy a
book. When results really matter, hire a facilitator. Recognize that there are
modern tools that help people make methodical progress toward results. These
tools are practical and easy to use. Of course, you have to know what they are
in order to use them. Call me (714-528-1300) for details.

2) People think they are inspiring.

Many people believe that long-winded announcements impress others. Actually,
it's the opposite. A long lecture quickly becomes a boring (and sometimes
offensive) harangue. Why? Most employees want an active role in contributing to
the business, and thus listening to a speech feels like a waste of time.

> What to do: Design meetings that give the attendees opportunities to
contribute. Plan questions that direct thinking toward the results that you
want. Use activities that help people make decisions. Distribute announcements

in letters, memos, or E-mails. Or, if you must use a meeting, keep announcements brief (less than a few minutes).

3) People think others agree with them.

Many people rely on nods, smiles, and eye contact to measure acceptance. Actually, most employees will do anything to appease a boss. And if the boss seems to be upset, the employees will become even more agreeable. Then, once the meeting ends, the employees will do one of three things: 1) forget the lecture, 2) ignore the message, or 3) sabotage the idea.

> What to do: Conduct meetings by a process that everyone considers to be fair. Use consensus to reach agreements and make decisions. People will accept decisions that they helped make.

4) People think others are clairvoyant.

Many people call meetings without an agenda expecting that everyone will arrive sharing their vision for what needs to be done. Actually, everyone brings their private hopes, fears, and vision to the meeting. Without a clear agenda, the result is something between chitchat and chaos, depending upon the complexity of the issue.

Note: A vague agenda, such as a list of topics, is almost as useless as no agenda.

> What to do: Write out your goal for the meeting. Then prepare an agenda that is so complete someone else could use it to run the meeting without you. Specify each step and provide a time budget. Send the agenda at least a day before the meeting so that the attendees can use it to prepare. Call key participants before the meeting to check if they have questions or want to talk about the agenda.

5) People think meetings are necessary.

Many people respond to every emergency, surprise, or twitch by calling a meeting. Actually, a meeting is a special (and expensive) process. It should be used only to obtain results that require the efforts of a group of people working as a team. A meeting is NOT a universal cure for everything. Meetings held for the wrong reasons, waste everyone's time.

> What to do: Challenge every meeting for its ability to earn a profit for your business. That is, make sure the value of the results is greater than the cost

of holding a meeting. If any other activity can accomplish the same result, use that other activity.