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"Quotes"

"I don't know. I probably will go to some meetings. If there's something that I need to voice my opinion on then I will go."

~Senga Allan

"It's about having conversations, rather than meetings."

~David Baldwin

"We had public meetings that lasted four to five hours, night after night."

~Paul Barnes

"If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings.'"

~Dave Barry

"Our meetings are held to discuss many problems which would never arise if we held fewer meetings."

~Ashleigh Brilliant

"In these days of rapid change, time is precious, and you can't afford to waste it in meetings."

~Mark Goulston

"I'll sit in on meetings ... we've got to brainstorm."

~Natalie Gulbis

"I'm concerned the facilitator for this meeting is using what I would refer to as a 'Yucca science model'. Any research she doesn't agree with, she doesn't acknowledge."

~Bill Hanlon

"Both meetings were productive. A lot of people came with some good questions. That's the purpose of the meetings: To get face-to-face...and ask questions."

~John Hritcko

"I literally have meetings at eight o'clock in the morning, and I finish at nine o'clock at night. It sounds



Dear Friend,

When Did I Lose Control of My Calendar?

Let me apologize right at the outset. I'm about to have a curmudgeonly moment.

Okay, here's my gripe.

What makes folks think, simply because they can see your calendar on Outlook, that they can cram it with meetings that run back-to-back-to-back-to-back? Sometimes it feels as if they're hovering, ready to swoop: "Aha, there are 5 open minutes on her schedule at 2:00 pm. We can use that time!"

Have I gone a little overboard? Perhaps I have. But, sometimes it sure feels as if all of those meetings, which are *supposed* to help us collaborate and make decisions so that we can actually DO something, end up yielding just the opposite result - a lot of NOTHING.

Whew! My moment is over. I got it out, and I feel better...at least until the next time someone tries to commandeer my calendar!

But, lest I leave you stewing, keep reading. This month's **EA Insights** looks at "Making Meetings Meaningful". Let's explore together some ways to use that time more effectively that we (or others) too often carve out of our day.

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Making Meetings Meaningful

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Meetings...

We love 'em...sometimes, anyway. However, probably more often, we love to hate 'em.

The reality for most of us, though, is whether we like them or not, meetings are an ever-present part of our lives. And, they probably will be until we retire...although nothing's promised, even then.



So, if these chunks of time with others, around an actual or a virtual table, are likely to be with us for the foreseeable future, how can we make them productive? Let me offer a few tips that are helpful for me.

Have a REAL purpose.

The bottom line for most of us is this: *Meeting just to meet is a waste of time. (I can hear you shouting "Amen!" all the way over here.)*

Because time is so precious, make sure that there is a *bona fide* reason to get together. It's not enough that today is the weekly meeting day. If nothing of significance has happened since the last time everyone gathered, and it's not critical to find out why nothing of significance has happened, then skip the meeting. I guarantee that few folks, if any, would be beating down your door, demanding an explanation for why this week's meeting was cancelled. Rather, they'll probably be ready to recommend you for a promotion (or, at least, give you a hug) because you've just given them back some much-needed time.

Okay, honestly, are there really any bona fide reasons to have that meeting? Now, there may be others, but four come to mind for me:

- There's a decision that needs to be made by you and at least one other person.
- You need tap into the brain power and/or get input from a specific person or group of people.
- It's time for an update on the status of a task, AND that update might cause questions, spark ideas, or generate discussion about broader impact (any of which are best done in a meeting format rather than on email).
- Information needs to be disseminated, AND that information should be heard (or heard first) rather than read, OR that information is best relayed to multiple people at the same time rather than one-by-one.

Include the right people.

Don't you hate it when you drag yourself to a meeting, only to find out that the key person involved in the agenda item can't be there or wasn't invited in the first place? *Really?*

For a meeting to be meaningful, the right people need to be

there. Once you determine WHY the meeting is necessary, consider WHO is necessary to have as a participant. Invite the people who have the best knowledge about, connection to, and/or authority over the matter at hand so that it's possible to accomplish something of value during this time.

Develop a thoughtful agenda.

No agenda...no meaningful meeting. That's not just a requirement for Type A personality sessions; it really does help with meeting effectiveness and efficiency overall.

In building the agenda, think through each item to be addressed during the meeting. Determine the desired outcome for each item; that is, set out whether the goal for each item is to make a decision, brainstorm, secure buy-in, or simply inform. Knowing what you want to accomplish, and stating this for participants, helps set clear expectations for everyone.

Decide the process you will use to cover each topic. (In other words, will you have a roundtable discussion, a PowerPoint presentation, breakout sets that later report back to the group as a whole, etc.) Devote a specific amount of time to each agenda item. That helps to move discussion along or, if a more conversation truly is needed, it allows the leader and the group to be intentional about extending the time or scheduling a follow-up session to complete the work on the topic. Also, it's important to designate a point person for each agenda item. There's nothing worse than having an item slated for attention but having nobody prepared to lead the discussion.

Finally, for an agenda to be most helpful, it has to be crafted and shared with participants in advance. This gives everyone an opportunity to prepare for their responsibility segments; to suggest other participants, if a critical person appears to be missing; to do necessary pre-meeting preparation; or to surface other relevant issues, in advance, that may be appropriate for inclusion on the agenda.

Be respectful of people's time.

If the meeting starts at 3:00 pm, everyone should be in place and ready to go by 3:00 pm. When a meeting is supposed to start at 3:00 pm, but doesn't get going until 3:10 pm or 3:15 pm because people are straggling in, that's time wasted. It's disrespectful to the people who were there on time, people who pushed "pause" on whatever they were doing to be in place as requested. It's also frustrating because, if the meeting does start and people are still coming in, not only is there disruption but it may be necessary to repeat and rehash, which slows everything down.

So, come on time. In fact, aim to be in place at least 5 minutes early (unless you have some set-up responsibilities that require even more up-front time). That may mean heading out a little earlier so that you can arrive at your destination -- across town, in the conference room down the hall, or on the phone -- on time. And, then, end on time. Don't turn an hour-long session into one that goes for 1.5 or 2 hours (unless everyone's in agreement to extend the time). That sort of meeting creep ends up impacting the next meeting, and more people, and so on. Give yourself an appropriate cushion between meetings so that you can navigate from one to another in a timely manner. And, be time-conscious so that you are aware of the flow of your schedule and respectful of the time of those around you.

Select the right facilitator.

While every agenda item should have a leader, someone should have responsibility for managing the meeting as a whole. This involves, of course, timekeeping. However, it also includes fostering interaction among meeting participants; being attuned to puzzled or unengaged looks and seeking to resolve them; moving the group through activities; and tracking action items, issues to be addressed later, and a range of other matters.

A decision must be made about the facilitation of each meeting. That is, will a member of the group be best to serve as the facilitator for this meeting, or would this role best be played by another? And, that's a critical question. Why?

- Facilitation really is a skill. Some folks are good at it, and some struggle. So, it's important to place this responsibility in hands that can pull it off.
- Even if you've got a meeting participant who's good at facilitation, you're asking that person to split his/her focus -- be a facilitator AND be a participant. It is *possible* to do both, but it's not always *easy* to do both. There undoubtedly will be times during the meeting when only one of those hats will be worn. That means that at some points, the group will be missing a facilitator or missing a person who, for substantive reasons, was viewed as a vital participant in the meeting.
- Lastly, there are times when, because of the nature of the issue(s) to be discussed, it's best to have a neutral, third party leading the discussion. The person isn't taking a position one way or another -- that's the role of the participants. Yet, this is a person who can ensure that the meeting doesn't get bogged down, or that people are being heard, or that the person responsible for or most critically involved in the issue isn't the same person who's leading the meeting and swaying the outcome.

So, as you're planning any meeting, step back and think about the best option for facilitation.

It is possible to make meetings meaningful, but it takes a little forethought. If you'd like help strategically approaching your next meeting, reach out to us here at **Executive Advantage**. We've ready to partner with you to maximize your time (and that of your meeting participants) and to help you reach the results you're after.

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pathetic, but I don't even have time to go shopping."

~Stella McCartney

"[W]e were prepared for our meetings. We had all done our homework and knew the issues."

~Anne Milling

"Those meetings are so good. It keeps me proud and keeps my resentment down. It reminds me of why we are ... there."

~Megan Mires

"The meetings are going on a lot longer than they should."

~Ray Murphy

"The new leader is a facilitator, not an order giver."

~John Naisbitt

"Emails can be dangerous. You tend to lose your formality and thoughtfulness in emails... It's a fine means of setting up meetings but for substantive purposes, you have to be much more careful of what you're doing[.]"

~Eric Rosenberg

"Our [people] came together and worked well as a group to brainstorm ideas, identify issues and shortfalls...a variety of areas that have to be addressed in this plan."

~Barney Welch

"We're not looking for meetings as an end in themselves. We're looking for results."

~Dennis Ross

"The least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings."

~Thomas Sowell

"We've had meetings, but we're looking for concrete operations planning."

~Barbara Stader

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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