

In This Issue

[Tell Me Again Why We're Meeting](#)

[Quotes](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[Solutions for Businesses](#)

[Solutions for Professionals](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"Big meetings and big talk are not enough in a world that is hungry for change. Big action ... is needed to bring big results[.]"
~Sylvia Mathews Burwell

"Meetings should be like salt - a spice sprinkled carefully to enhance a dish, not poured recklessly over every forkful. Too much salt destroys a dish. Too many meetings destroy morale and motivation."
~Jason Fried

"Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything."
~John Kenneth Galbraith

"Meetings, clearly, can take place anywhere, and wouldn't it be nice to see your coworkers lounging on the grass with their shoes off?"
~Tom Hodgkinson

"Nothing generates more heat in the government than the question of who is chosen to participate in important meetings."
~Richard Holbrooke

"The majority of meetings should be discussions that lead to decisions."
~Patrick Lencioni

"Has anyone ever said, 'I wish I could go to more meetings today?'"
~Matt Mullenweg



Dear Friend,

Another Meeting!?

You're on a flow, actually getting some work done.

Suddenly, you hear the "ding" or see the reminder pop up on your digital screen. You know the notification I mean...that 15-minute cue that A *MEETING* is about to happen.

That's right. You are expected to press "pause" on this wonderful, long overdue, and likely not to return anytime soon, focused workflow you have going. And now, you must head to the conference room, someone's office, computer portal, or phone, and...meet!

Do you even remember what this meeting's supposed to be about?

Do you even have a clue why you were invited?

Do you even know what you were supposed to have read or prepared?

Ugh!

Meetings...we all have them. And, if we're honest, far too many of them fall into the unproductive category.

So, join me for this month's *EA Insights* as we take a look at improving meetings. If you meet me there, I'll do my best to make it worth your while!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Tell Me Again Why We're Meeting...

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Indulge me for a minute.

Think about the last 5 meetings you attended. (*If zeroing in on that number is proving to be a challenge for you, just think about your meeting schedule from last week or for this month so far.*) Okay, of those meetings that you remember, come up with a percentage of how many of them left you feeling:

"Wow, that was a great meeting! I'm so glad we all were able to get together and work 'that' out!" Would you say, that this "wasn't that great" sentiment reflects 100% of the meetings? (*I'm pushing it; I know.*) How about 75%...50%...30%...can you at least say 10%?

Unfortunately, in too many instances, the meetings we hold, or those we attend, leave much to be desired. They produce little and just suck up vital time that could have been invested in better ways.

So, lest I am accused of doing the same, let me offer five quick tips for improving your next meeting experience. These tips should be effective whether you are the meeting planner or attendee.

Tip #1: Have a purpose to meet.

This seems as if it's a no-brainer. Think about it, though. How many times do meetings occur SIMPLY because they're on the schedule? For example, it's the day of the monthly meeting and, by golly, the meeting's *going* to take place! It matters little that there's nothing of consequence on the agenda.

Time's too precious. That example should never reflect the way we function. If there's nothing to discuss, don't meet. (*Trust me; folks will be extremely happy!*) And, if you do want to get together...just to catch up...make the session optional so that people can reach informed decisions about the best way to use that time.



Similarly, if there is a purpose for communicating as a group, but what needs to occur is relatively cut-and-dry (that is, it involves little need for discussion or presentation), then perhaps a meeting isn't necessary. In these instances, perhaps reaching out to group members via email for the needed confirmation, or other simple input, is a better option.

The bottom line is that meetings are more productive when there is a legitimate reason to have people stop what they are doing and gather together.

Tip #2: Have a specific goal for the meeting.

The point here is that it is important to determine the desired outcome(s) for each meeting. Is this session intended to brainstorm? Then the outcome is a list of possibilities. Is the reason for meeting so that you can receive status reports? Then the outcome is an updated assessment of the assigned tasks. Is the meeting's purpose to facilitate collaboration among people from diverse units so that planning can be more holistic? Then the outcome is a set of commitments for when and how people will work together. Is the gathering intended to yield a decision about a certain topic? Then the outcome is an answer to the question on the floor.

You see, not only should there be a reason for gathering people together, as opposed to engaging them in some other way. The planner also should have a clear outcome in mind for that gathering. Getting folks in a room (actual or virtual)...just to talk...is unlikely to result in a meeting that leaves them thrilled about giving up a half-hour, hour, or more. Some will participate, but many will walk away wondering whether what they just experienced was worth the time.

Tip #3: Have a meeting plan.

While lording over a meeting with an iron fist may be counter-productive, winging it is too.

The best meetings are those that are conducted according to a thoughtful meeting plan. What needs to be covered, by whom, when, for how long? How will discussion be integrated into each meeting segment? What decision or action needs to result from each portion of the session? Will a facilitator be useful so that everyone can participate or to infuse a neutral presence in the room? What do people need to do or know before they gather in order to prepare for what they will do together?

By thinking through the specifics of each meeting, it is more likely that the group will be able to accomplish meaningful objectives in the time that has been set aside.

Tip #4: Have the right people in the room.

A meeting is doomed before it begins if the wrong bottoms are in the seats. The most productive meetings include the people who have the necessary information, expertise, decision-making authority, functional responsibility, and/or relationships to address the issue(s) at hand properly. While it is impossible and imprudent to invite everyone to every meeting; craft the guest list strategically. Do not exclude people who are instrumental in accomplishing that identified outcome(s).

Tip #5: Have appropriate follow up.

One frequent complaint about meetings is that people do a lot of talking, but afterward nothing gets done. When that is the pattern, meetings become a waste of time.

So, before the end of each meeting, ensure that specific action items are captured, along with the names of the people responsible for completing each task. Develop realistic target completion dates as well as times for status reporting. Identify and allocate the resources necessary to do the slated work. Always assign an owner for each item -- that person who will be accountable for the matter -- and ensure that s/he has the authority or, at a minimum, a direct line to the person with the authority to call out anyone who is failing to follow through.

However, even with a solid execution plan, the challenge comes in not allowing life to derail implementation. If a topic is important enough to invest the time and effort to explore and plan for it in a meeting, it should be important enough to ensure that the agreed-upon implementation also is prioritized. Otherwise, well...

Those are my five tips for more successful meetings. Try building them into the way you function, and see if the time you set aside for gathering folks together is more effective.

One last note...these tips are simple, but they are not necessarily easy. The good news is that you needn't go it alone. Call **Executive Advantage**. We would be honored to help you with strategic meeting design, facilitation, and/or follow up. [Contact us today](#).



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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.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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"When leaders know how to lead great meetings, there's less time wasted and less frustration. We have more energy to do the work that matters, realize our full potential, and do great things."

~Justin
Rosenstein

"People who enjoy meetings should not be in charge of anything."

~Thomas Sowell

"When I'm in management meetings when we're deciding my future, those decisions are left up to me. I'm the one who has to go out and fulfill all these obligations, so I should be able to choose which ones I do or not."

~Taylor Swift

"Corporate America is drowning in meetings. To make one thing clear, I am not against communication. Quick one-on-ones can be extremely effective. I am talking about those hour-long recurring meetings, devoid of a clear agenda, and attended by many. I dread them."

~Sebastian Thrun

"The amount of meetings I've been in - people would be shocked. But that's how you gain experience, how you can gain knowledge, being in meetings and participating. You learn and grow."

~Tiger Woods