

Enough is Enough: Banish Meeting Madness

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We all go to meetings, sometimes even multiple meetings in the same day. A recent [Bain & Company study](#) reports that managers spend 15 percent of their time in meetings, and executives spend two full days per week in meetings. And according to a [report on the “state of the modern meeting”](#) published by *Blue Jeans Network*, staff members in many organizations spend up to half of each business day in meetings.

If your schedule is anything like that of the leaders in these surveys, you’re probably heading to or just getting out of a meeting. Are most of the meetings you attend productive and useful? Does hope spring eternal when you peruse your calendar of upcoming meetings?! Unfortunately, many staff give meetings a low grade. Ready to clear your calendar? Hold on! Professor and author Mark Addleson argues that in an office staffed by “knowledge workers,” meetings are where the real work takes place. In his thought-provoking book, *Beyond Management*, Addleson explains that meetings are where today’s knowledge workers share information, develop solutions to challenges, and collectively make decisions.

Tips to Make Meetings Matter

Consider the following simple tips to become the meeting convener whose meetings everyone wants to attend.

1. **Be clear** – Make the meeting objective crystal clear in the meeting invite. Help the team focus on the task at hand by reiterating the purpose before inviting your colleagues to dive in.
2. **Don’t bait and switch** – Show respect for your colleagues by being straight up when it comes to the meeting purpose and any related goals. Never pretend you’re seeking candid input and creative ideas when you’ve already made up your mind.
3. **Engage, don’t preach** – There’s nothing worse than being invited to a meeting to share your ideas but finding out that the leader simply wants you to serve as an audience member for his/her lecture. If you want to lecture or preach, convene a rally, not a meeting. If you truly want to find out what others think, start the real conversation as quickly as possible.
4. **Appreciate different points of view** – Never pay lip service to diverse points of view by saying, “everyone’s opinion counts” when it’s clear you’re only interested in what you have to say! Introverted attendees? Rather than letting the extroverts dominate (which they will!), try going clockwise or counter-clockwise around the table to invite each participant to share their take or thoughts on the subject at hand.
5. **Quick consensus? Exercise caution!** – Although quick consensus may feel good, it’s not always best for your mission or the decision at hand. In some cases, attendees who are weary with the subject matter will quickly agree to shortcut the agony of the meeting. Instead of adjourning and thinking you’ve been successful, remind yourself to question too-quick consensus. For example, “That was quick, but let’s make sure we’ve considered the important angles. What viewpoints have we missed? Have we thought about the risks?”
6. **Celebrate off-beat contributions** – Even if an attendee’s idea seems off-base, unrealistic or controversial, don’t ignore it. Always try to go beyond your superficial assessment of the comment to find the nugget of wisdom or truth someone else’s perspective, beliefs or concerns.
7. **Consider holding more frequent, but shorter meetings** – Everyone is busy, and there is often something that your attendees would rather do than sit in a meeting. But remember that productive meetings are where things happen and important decisions get made. Instead of giving up on meetings,

experiment with shorter, more frequent meetings. Ditch the overly ambitious meeting agenda for single-topic conversations.

To explore the topic of meeting efficiency further, check out tips from the *Harvard Business Review* on [making meetings productive](#) or *Fast Company's* article on [reclaiming wasted hours](#). For an entertaining overview of personalities you may find in your next meeting, check out our RISK eNews, [Meet, Greet, Grin and Adjust](#).

The NRMC welcomes questions and inquiries about risk topics at 703.777.3504.