Six Epic Meeting Mistakes

...and
how you
can
avoid them!

A JCG Management Consulting Special Report

No meeting is perfect...

... but there sure are a lot of bad ones!

Corporate America is saturated with meetings, more meetings, and even meetings looking into the complaint that we have too many meetings!

Guess what? Very often, real work doesn't get done in meetings! It's time to put an end to the insanity. Some meetings should be taken behind the barn and shot.

Those that must happen should be efficient and effective. There should be an objective, and some forethought that says a meeting is the best or only way to achieve that objective. Then, it should be executed with excellence.

"What are we doing?"

Mistake #1: NO AGENDA

Every "formal" meeting should have a written agenda. (By formal we mean it's not a hallway conversation or emergency gathering). It should be sent in advance to the participants, with copies available in the room.

Agendas are key to maintaining focus and should be crafted around achieving whatever the objectives are for that meeting. Many companies have a standard template. If not, click File > New in Microsoft Word and search for Agenda. You will find about a dozen professionally prepared agenda templates you can download and fill out. Only takes a minute. Typical agendas include these topics:

- Date, time, location
- Attendees, meeting leader, timekeeper, scribe, facilitator
- Meeting purpose
- Topics with topic owners and timeframes
- Contact information for questions
- Notes on any pre-reading or materials to bring along

Top Six Meeting Malfunctions

- NO AGENDA
- NO ACTION ITEM TRACKING / NO NOTES
- TRYING TO DO TOO MUCH
- NO TIME MANAGEMENT
- HOLDING HOSTAGES
- NO ESTABLISHED ROLES

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"I didn't agree to that!"

Mistake #2: NO MINUTES / ACTION ITEM LOG

The only thing worse than not taking notes or logging decisions and actions, is to do so and never refer to them. Notes should be kept. One of the first agenda topics is to review the status of actions from the last meeting. One of the last agenda items should be to review the decisions, plans and actions generated in the current meeting.

"This is 10 pounds of topics in a 5 pound bag..."

Mistake #3: TRYING TO DO TOO MUCH

Nothing more fun that walking into a meeting only to get hit in the face with a shovel full of topics. Agendas need to set realistic time limits for topics that include presentation and dialogue. The meeting timeline should account for the proper pace with a buffer for unanticipated (but vital) discussions.
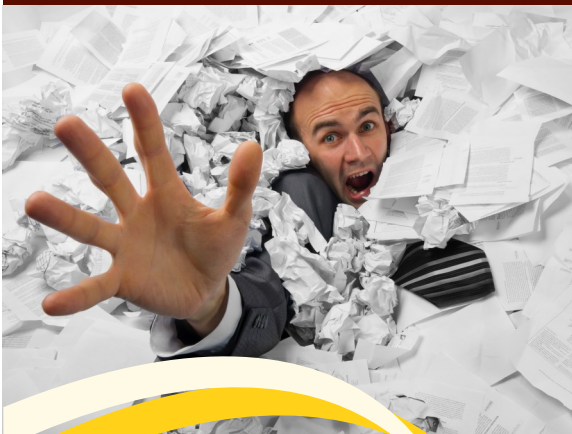
"Tick, Tock..."

Mistake #4: NO TIME MANAGEMENT

Better to plan on 60 min. and only take 45 than vice versa. Once you set an agenda with time-bound topics, it's vital to manage the time. Set a timer or appoint a time-keeper. Give signals when you are t-minus 2 minutes to the end and when time is up. If "Topic A" runs over, stop and determine if you should go onto Topic B, call a separate meeting to discuss Topic A, or remove a later agenda item and stay on Topic A.

"Should I even be here?"

Mistake #5: HOLDING HOSTAGES

Ever been to a meeting where the only thing relevant to you was the donuts? A lot of meetings are being held that could be handled in different ways: voicemail broadcasts, emails, offline collaboration, bulletin board announcements, web sites, etc. "Should this even be a meeting?" and "Should I be there?" are key questions for everyone. Explore different ways of communication— only use meetings if that is the best way to achieve your objective.

Be sensitive to those you invite to your meetings and indicate if their attendance is optional. Can they just read the minutes? Also, not everyone needs to be there the entire meeting. Can you organize the agenda so you can release people as the agenda progresses? Or have them arrive later to only sit in on the parts relevant to them?

"Who's on First?"

Mistake #6: NO ROLES

People randomly talking about different topics at the same time.   The third meeting today discussing the mystery of why we're not productive.   Sound familiar?   Efficient, effective meetings do not happen by accident.   Not only does the meeting leader view the meeting as a process, they assign specific roles to ensure the process runs well.   Assignments can rotate from meeting to meeting and include:

- Meeting Leader— responsible for the overall event

- Meeting Facilitator— moderates discussions / facilitates decisions / uses facilitation tools to gain consensus

- Scribe - mans the flip charts and white board

- Note Taker— keeps the minutes and action item log

- Time Keeper—manages agenda timeline / give time cues

How many of these Meeting Mistakes have you experienced?

Anybody can have a meeting.   Having a good meeting is something very rare (unfortunately).

We feel your pain.   It's our hope that the tips in this report can relieve at least some of the meeting-based agony you experience on a daily basis.   For more resources and information on effective meeting skills, feel free to contact us.   Happy meetings!

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