



## **Best Practices**

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### **Another Wasted Meeting?**

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As the 20-30 million daily meetings go on, here you are, stuck in another time waster. But do not fret, you are not alone. You can, even if you are not “officially” in control, at least help the meeting finish in a reasonable time with reasonable results.

Here are some tried and true meeting management techniques you can use to move the meeting along:

**AGENDA PLEASE.** . . “Who has a copy of the agenda?” Play dumb, you forgot to bring your copy or never received it through email. No meeting should be called without an agenda; no successful meeting happens without one. So, where is it? More importantly, and you may want to pose this as a question for future meetings: “Why cannot the agenda be sent out before the meeting so everyone can prepare?”

**TIME FRAMES.** . . “How much time do we have?” Without set time frames for each agenda item, meetings can go on and on and on, reaching no conclusions or the wrong conclusions. And what happens to the participants, they get worn down by fruitless off target time wasting activities. Ask for “time goals” for each agenda topic. In fact, insist on it! You might even use the old saying “time is money, after all” to make your point.

**CLARIFICATION PLEASE.** . . Things starting to get out-of-control, turn to the last person who made a cogent point and say “Jamie, I am not sure I understood what you meant by your last comment, could you clarify it for me?” This takes control away from the participant time wasters and brings the discussion back to Jamie’s point, which hopefully was addressing the agenda topic being talked about.

**JUMP START.** . . If things are starting to bog down, ask for a time check. If you do not have a time warden (every meeting needs one) be one yourself. For example, “we have spent ten minutes on this item; if we do not move along we will never complete the agenda.” Or “how much time do we have left to cover all the agenda items?”

**SUMMARIZE PLEASE.** . . Stalled again? Ask the leader to summarize all the decisions made to this point in the meeting. This puts the focus on what has been done, away from time wasters. It also focuses what is left to be accomplished.

**CLARIFICATION. . AGAIN.** . . Still cannot move things along? Enter the fray with a clarification question. “Let me see if I have this right . . . we are going to .....? You do not even have to be accurate, in fact stating things unclearly might help others get focused in order to correct you.

**ACTION STEP.** . . Almost done, but the ending is unclear? Ask for clarification:

- o Who is responsible for each decision agreed to?
- o When are the minutes of the meeting to be sent out?
- o When are the progress reports due?
- o When is the next meeting?
- o When can we expect an agenda for that meeting?

Almost anything will do at this point to move the meeting to completion.

The key concepts for successful meetings: agenda, time goals, focus, clarification and action steps.

Guaranteed to work? Well, nothing is guaranteed, but judicious use of these concepts can simplify your life and shorten time wasting meetings. Time is not a renewable resource, so use it wisely!

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