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Meetings Meetings

Shaving Minutes From Your Meetings

Meetings are the number one time waster in an organization. Planning meetings, status meetings, forecast review meetings and yes – even sales meetings. A Fortune study a few years ago showed that 97% of senior executives even found vendor meetings to be boring, unproductive and unexciting.

It's a form of corporate pollution – and if you are an SE manager, a senior SE, or basically in charge of anything (maybe even a humble POC) you are contributing to this productivity drain every time you call a meeting. So what's a poor SE to do? Look beyond the standard “*do you really need a meeting*” and “*send out an agenda*” advice and adopt a **less** is more philosophy.ⁱ

Shaving The Minutes From The Meeting

1. **Less Time** - Turn 60 minutes into 45. You are in sales – so make it a competition. If you typically take an hour to run a status meeting, challenge the participants to get it done in 45 minutes instead. Once settled into a 45-minute timeslot, trim it further. Your colleagues with quotas will thank you.
2. **Less Interruptions**. No cell phones and no live laptops on email unless they are an integral part of the meeting. When someone walks in late don't restart or recap the meeting unless they are really, really important.
3. **Less People**. Sure – you invite who you really need. Maybe someone from services and support to get that RFP kicked off and answered. My rule of thumb is that if you know another org outside of presales is going to be responsible for some task – get them into the meeting. If they are just there for the ride-along maybe you offer to de-invite them under the guise of saving them time.
4. **Less Lateness**. Starting a meeting at 11am may not be a hardship for you in presales if you don't have a meeting at 10am. However, for that poor person in product marketing

it might be their third or fourth meeting of the day. Sometimes starting at 11.15 (and putting that in the invite) is a winning strategy.

5. **Less Room.** Yeah – it may be nice to grab the executive conference room, but I’d bet you probably get more done at a small table in the cafeteria. Plus, the smaller the table, the less room for toys like laptops and cellphones.
6. **Less Guessing.** OK, so I said I’d duck the agenda issue. However – putting a section at the top of the agenda listing “**Decisions we need to make**” can really help clarify the mind and make sure people are prepared.
7. **Less “Winging-It”.** Debrief after the meeting with a colleague or your boss. Where did you lose time or focus? What can you do to improve? Hey – it’s your time!
8. **Less Waste.** A popular corporate meeting game is to add up the salaries of everyone in the room and figure out what the meeting costs. That is a radical understatement in sales. Try adding up the combined quotas of everyone in the room and divide by 2000 for an hour meeting. Now you have a real number! Write it on the board and ask people to guess what it is the first time you do this.
9. **Less Client Time.** Really? Just because you have two hours with a customer for a demo or a presentation does not mean you have to use it all. Try getting a 10am to noon demo done by 11.45 – and then ask the customer out for lunch if appropriate – rather than running late until 12.15 and getting everyone hungry and grumpy because they have to eat in the corporate cafeteria.

"You can ask me for anything except time"

Napoleon Bonaparte

Any great ideas for eliminating or shortening meetings? Let me know!

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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ⁱ Time Management Ninja – Craig Jarrow