



[Click here](#) to go The Flourishing Company In The News

Life at Work

Amy Joyce



We Gather to Blather Together

Holding Meeting After Meeting Can Keep People From Doing Their Jobs

By Amy Joyce

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sunday, November 2, 2003; Page F05

Ever feel as if your office might have a meeting to discuss the last meeting and plan the next one?

We live in a meeting culture. Planning meetings, sales meetings, client meetings, one-on-ones. It doesn't seem that meetings have increased so much as simply continued, no matter how frustrating that may be. No matter how much people complain that they would rather be working than talking about work. No matter how much even managers say they need to cut down on meetings. Meetings continue at full speed and can be a pain, sucking the workday away before much work is actually accomplished.

Not only do the meeting-goers suffer, but those who need them suffer as well.

"I'm not stuck in them that much," said one woman who works in technology sales and service at a Rockville firm, who asked to remain anonymous. "But other people I need to interact with are unavailable because of meetings. It's difficult for us to conduct appropriate planning because they get tied up in things." In this case, "appropriate planning" is not code for more meetings. This woman just needs her co-workers to help her finish a project. But so many of them are tied up in meetings, her work has to be put off until they are free.

And it can be especially frustrating when she sees the people she needs sitting in on meetings, playing with their BlackBerrys because "they can't do their normal job."

Another woman said she finds it intimidating when she comes to work and realizes how many meetings are on her calendar. She finds the meetings useful when she is there, but then realizes there is little precious time left in the day to do her other work, or simply think. "Well, that's what showers are for, right?" she said with a laugh.

Heather Bradley, a workplace consultant in the Washington area, said she thinks meeting issues are at least as old as King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. "They were having the same problem we have today. They were mired in meetings," she said.

Before she worked with just one other partner, Bradley herself was mired in meetings. One day, her manager said he wanted to know for every 10 minutes they sat in the meeting just how much money the company was losing. Bradley doesn't remember the figure, but it was a lot. And it was painfully obvious they were losing money in some subtle ways. Every time the meeting-goers were given a break, they ran to their desks to listen to voice mail and get "real" work done. Her boss noted that getting everyone back to the meeting was "like herding cats."

If your desk chair is plastered with a bumper sticker that reads "Will Break for Meetings," you are not alone. But if you're like many others, you're probably frustrated, unless your boss knows how to hold a meeting. Probably the smaller the organization, the easier it is.

For Bradley Nierenberg, president of Momentum Marketing in Alexandria, meetings are necessary. But he tries to make sure they don't take over the lives of his 38 employees. He asks that everyone be on time to the weekly staff meeting every Thursday morning. If employees are late, they have to sing a song in front of everyone. Their choice of song.

That bit of embarrassment ensures everyone gets in on time, and gets to work at the meeting so they can all . . . get to work. Nierenberg always hated it at previous jobs when people were late for meetings. It made everyone stop the meeting. Then everyone would whisper about that person or think poorly of that person later. So he felt the singing got all of that out in the open in a fun way. "The person that was late felt bad, the others felt good, we moved on," he said. And he moves on with a purpose. "Meetings have a set agenda. We know what we're going to go over."

With no planning, meetings can be not only tedious but a total waste of time.

Tony Prutting of Prutting and Prevost Insurance Solutions in Bethesda does not have a boss down the hall to answer to. He has his own business and works from home. Therefore, he finds his days joyously almost free of meeting after meeting, which his pre-self-employed life used to be filled with.

Today, he still goes to meetings, but he tries to pick and choose and make sure they will be helpful to his clients, his business and him. He'll attend vendor

meetings, but "not too many, because they can be a waste of time," he said. "Something that can be done in 15 minutes takes an hour and a half."

So he mostly goes to meetings that he can "get an education from." If he can, he goes a few minutes late to group meetings that have a speaker, because he knows the first 30 minutes or so will be spent on "fluff."

He hates it when he goes to a meeting for which the speaker obviously didn't prepare, because he doesn't learn anything and he wasted time where he could be working. But sometimes even meetings with bad speakers can be beneficial, he said, because "it makes you focus on the topic at hand, rather than saying 'I'll get to that later' and never getting to it."

© 2003 The Washington Post Company



[Click here](#) to go The Flourishing Company News and Articles