

# ***Meetings - an Alternative to Work?***

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If the headline above made you smile then I suspect you will have experienced meetings that were not as effective as they could have been. Let's face it; attending a poorly planned, badly run meeting, where you contribute or learn little, just wastes everyone's time.

So what can we do about it?

## ***Set Objective Agendas***

The least effective (but most common) agenda is one that tells you almost nothing about what the meeting aims to achieve. Simply listing subjects is not enough; you need to know why you should attend, what contribution you are expected to make and what outcome is desired.

Don't forget that a 1-hour meeting with 6 attendees is equivalent to 6 hours of effort. If it were your money would you pay someone for 6 hours of time to discuss things that might not have any impact to you or your business? Probably not.

A better idea is to ensure that meetings have an objective-based agenda.

How about this example of an agenda item?

**PC's**

Not very descriptive is it? What about them? Do we have enough, are they powerful enough, are they breaking down, do they need upgrading? You simply cannot tell, thus rendering this particular item CU (completely useless)!

How about this next one then...

**Upgrading of PC's**

Ah, that's more like it but I still don't know if I really ought to attend, or not.

This might be better...

**Upgrading of PC's in Finance**

Now we are getting somewhere. If I work in Finance, or have responsibility for PC upgrades, I now have some interest in this. But do I need to contribute and what will I get out of it? Perhaps this might do the trick...

**To agree on a plan for the upgrading of PC's in Finance (following a presentation by IT)**

I'm now much clearer about what to expect, and if I work for the IT department I would be getting my PowerPoint slides dusted off now!

Of course all of this is common sense, but people still plan (and willingly attend) meetings without seeing an objective-based agenda and then wonder why little, or nothing, was achieved.

## ***Keep Focused***

Time is the one thing we really can't afford to squander, so every minute of a meeting should be used wisely.

If you've adopted an objective-based agenda then you've already taken the first step to making the most of meeting time (especially if you limit the number of agenda items).

But, you also need to stay 'on task' during the meeting and this is much more difficult. Having an effective Chair really helps here as they will ensure that irrelevant or unnecessary discussion is kept to a minimum (or left to another, separate meeting).

In the same vein it's also important to avoid AOB items creeping in. This might seem a bit heretical but these extra 'little' items will take over the meeting if you're not careful. Unless an item directly relates to one of the agenda items it really should be deflected to a separate meeting.

Meetings should also be kept short to avoid droops in concentration. If it's really important to continue then take a break and re-convene after everyone is refreshed. Don't drag it out!

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