

'Meeting-itis' is a disease

Tackle your too-many-meetings culture head on

Meetings are a critical part of business. They are the forum for making sure things progress, problems are solved, decisions are made and information is communicated. But they also can create problems.

Meetings can be addictive, unproductive and destroy value, if you have too many meetings and/or very long meetings.



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I don't have scientific data, but countless professionals have complained to me about their company "meeting-itis." They run from meeting to meeting and aren't able to get things accomplished in between.

Meetings and group interactions are necessary but can turn into a disease that impacts productivity, execution and morale.

Identify the root causes

What's the root cause of too many or long meetings? Here are a few:

- Management style: This is just the way we do business.
- Culture of over-collaboration and consensus decisions: We make all decisions in a group and need to do whatever it takes to reach consensus.
- "Analysis paralysis" and the need to review everything together prior to decision-making: There's a lack of confidence in the work or lack of accountability for what is being discussed.
- The fear of saying no: People accept all invitations because it would be rude to say no.
- Inadequate preparation: Meetings go on too long and we don't know what was accomplished.
- Process-orientation and lots of process documents: Our organization requires team interactions to manage internal processes.
- Management insecurity: Being in

meetings means we are busy and productive.

- Lack of strategic priorities and too many distractions: Priorities "du jour" pull us into constant meetings to respond to management requests.

Treating the problem

Besides using roller blades to travel quickly, how can you treat a vicious case of "meeting-itis"? I generally recommend a meeting intervention. Short of that, follow these steps:

- Establish clear goals and objectives for meetings. Avoid the warm-up chat and go straight to the point as meeting moderator.
- Conduct training on how to conduct productive meetings; volunteer to do that training.
- Ban food and drinks. People love to be fed and accept meetings for that reason.
- Schedule 30-minute meetings and make that clear in the introduction.
- Ask yourself: "Am I creating value in this meeting?" Block time for "productive work" so you cannot be invited if people have access to your calendar.
- Jump on the bandwagon of companies allowing meeting-free time slots or days.
- Have the confidence to decline invitations or stay only for a short period. Make it clear from the get go.
- Work from home once in a while. Even better, get out and see customers.

You need to tackle this head-on and give some free time to your teams to produce and create. Set guidelines and work with your worst offenders. You know who they are ... unless you're one of them. ●



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