

Globe Careers

WEEKEND WORKOUT » MEETINGS

Getting the most out of meetings

As an exercise in communication, there's a lot of room for improvement

BY JENNIFER MYERS

The weekly department meeting, the project status meeting, the production meeting, the monthly division meeting, the all-staff meeting – no wonder you might be feeling a little “meet-inged out.”

And you might want to think twice before you schedule your next workplace meeting: A recent survey by staffing company OfficeTeam found that managers believe 25 per cent of meetings are a waste of time.

That's because many professionals lack the necessary training to facilitate efficient business meetings, says Helen Wilkie, a communications consultant, speaker and author of *The Hidden Profit Centre*.

“They're expected to run meetings, they're supposed to know how, but they've never been taught how,” she says.

In today's economy of lean work forces and time-strapped employees, workers have little time and patience for meetings that they view as soul-sucking, boring, a waste of time or simply keeping them from getting real work done, she says.

As a result, workers tune out. “They pull out their BlackBerries and iPhones and start to conduct the business of their jobs. So they're not in either place, and that's frustrating.”

Companies may not be able to have fewer meetings, but they can make them more worth the time and effort they require, she adds.

“Meetings are simply an exercise in communication: We speak, we listen, we discuss, we decide.”

» Special to *The Globe and Mail*

MEETING PLANNER

Best meeting time:
Tuesday, 3 p.m.

Worst meeting time:
Monday, 9 a.m.

» Source: *When Is Good*, 2009 survey

MEETING EFFICIENCY » TWO COMPANIES' TACTICS



I Love Rewards Inc. employees take part in their nine-minute daily 'To the point' meeting. J.P. MOCZULSKI FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

I LOVE REWARDS INC., TORONTO

STRATEGY

“To the point” meeting – a daily, nine-minute gathering of the company's 50 employees.

HOW IT WORKS

Every morning at 11:15, employees gather together for a standing, rapid-fire information exchange that includes news of the day, a department spotlight, red flags, key stats and staff priorities, with each staff member relating his or most important task for the day.

GOAL

To efficiently increase communication, connect staff and give everyone in the company a voice.

PAYOFF

“We've eliminated half the e-mails and half the meetings we used to have. People are much more productive,” says chief executive officer Razor Suleman.

ACCENTURE CANADA, TORONTO

STRATEGY

Teleconferencing

HOW IT WORKS

Accenture has installed 50 teleconferencing rooms at its offices worldwide, including two sites set up in Toronto and Vancouver in September. Employees can book meeting rooms from their computers by using Outlook.

GOAL

To allow staff to connect with colleagues and clients worldwide without the time and cost of travel.

PAYOFF

The teleconferencing option not only eases the travel toll on employees, it reduces the firm's carbon footprint and saves Accenture worldwide about \$2-million a month on travel costs, says Chris Miller, Accenture's Chicago-based global leader for collaboration 2.0 program.

FIVE DEADLY MEETING SINS

- 1 Meeting without an agenda or objective.
- 2 Wrong people are invited.
- 3 Meeting goes on too long.
- 4 Participants drone on or constantly wander off topic without intervention.
- 5 Decisions are not converted into actions.

» Source: Helen Wilkie, communications consultant, speaker and author of *The Hidden Profit Centre*

TIME IS MONEY

Ever wonder about the true cost of your workplace meetings? Several free online applications will calculate the cost of your business meetings, including:

MEETING METER, an application developed by U.S. business consultant Bernard DeKoven, (<http://www.deepfun.com/meeter.htm>)

IPHONE APPLICATIONS, such as Meeting Metre Pro, Meeting Cost and Time=Money.

Simply enter the name and salaries of meeting participants and, similar to a taxi meter, you'll get a running tally of your meeting cost.