

## On My Mind...Meetings

By Jeri Mae Rowley

On my mind lately is the incredible amount of time we spend in meetings. First, I've gathered some "meeting minutia" detailing the amount of time, thought and dollars invested each year in meetings:

- Over 10 million business meetings take place in the United States every day.
- Most middle managers spend 30 percent of their time in meetings.
- Top management will spend up to 80 percent of their work week in meetings.
- As many as 11 million meetings occur daily in the United States.
- Ninety percent of managers report that half of the meetings they attend are "either unnecessary or a complete waste of time."
- If you spend just four hours a week in meetings you will sit through over 9,000 hours of meetings in your working lifetime---that's over 365 days!



**Jeri Mae Rowley**

To plan and participate in more effective meetings ask these ten questions. Try them...you'll like them:

- 1. Why are we meeting?** The purpose of the meeting identifies the outcomes we desire. State the purpose of what you plan to accomplish in this single meeting.
- 2. Who should attend?** Based on the purpose of the meeting, determine which participants are needed and can make a significant contribution to the meeting objective. If the purpose of the meeting is to share information,

everyone who needs the information could be invited to listen to the presentation.

If the purpose of the meeting is decision making, try to limit the number of participants to twelve or less (five to seven is ideal.)

**3. When and where should we meet?** Based on your responses to the first two questions, determine what time and place best suit the accomplishment of your purpose. Campbell's Soup once had a board meeting in the back room of a grocery store and then sent board members out to mingle with the customers to get feedback on products.

**4. What do we need before the meeting?** Every meeting must have an agenda. Make every effort to circulate the agenda, and pertinent meeting preparation materials, before the meeting so that participants arrive prepared.

**5. How long should we meet?** Meet as long as it takes to accomplish the purpose. A recent article in Industry Week magazine suggests that meetings last no more than 29 minutes and 59 seconds!

**6. How should we design the meeting?** Meeting design includes time, space, room set up, audio visual, agenda, as well as decision making and communications processes. Design your meeting with a focus on achieving the purpose of the meeting and creating a synergistic environment.

**7. Does everybody understand their role in the meeting?** In the book "How to Make Meetings Work" Doyle and Straus introduced the interaction meeting method with clearly defined roles for facilitator, leader, participant and recorder. Their meeting roles were designed for meetings where open idea sharing, honest discussion, and creative problem solving and decision making were needed.

**8. How can we stay on track?** Have an agenda with allocated time, process, and person(s) responsible for each agenda item.

To minimize interruptions, have an agenda with breaks identified that allows participants to let their staff know when they will be available to return calls or respond to questions. A great ground rule for meetings is that "no one will be interrupted during the meeting for anything they would not get in their car and drive 100 miles to take care of."

Use one flip chart to track non-agenda ideas that come up. Label the chart “we’ll get back to it” or “parking lot.” At the end of the meeting, use this list to build your next agenda

**9. How will we know if the meeting was effective?** Throughout the meeting, gather assignments, deadlines and accomplishments on a flip chart that all participants can see. You could call this a “time and action calendar.” Review the calendar at the end of the meeting to send the troops off with a clear idea of what was accomplished at this meeting and what needs to be done.

Evaluate every meeting to evaluate meeting planning, processes, participation and outcomes.

**10. Should we meet again?** Review the “purpose” “parking lot” and “time and action calendar” to determine the if, when, where, who, and how of a future meeting. Then, start with question one and proceed to design your next effective meeting.

**New Year’s Resolution** If we’re going to spend so much of our time in meetings, and if meetings are necessary to get important work done, let’s resolve to make our meetings in 2003 as effective as possible.

Want to read more about effective meeting planning and participation? Here are some recommendations from my bookshelf:

How to Make Meetings Work, Michael Doyle and David Straus

First Aid for Meetings, Charlie Hawkins

Managing Teams, Lawrence Holpp

The Team Handbook, Oriel Incorporated

---

Jeri Mae Rowley, M.S. Human Resource Management, is a popular speaker, trainer and facilitator. By weaving together her unique humor and storytelling skills, Jeri Mae helps individuals and organizations improve leadership, communications, and customer service. Participants in her programs often comment: “She’s not boring!”

Jeri Mae Rowley  
600 Alice Drive  
Great Falls, MT 59405  
406-781-7206      [jerimae@jmrowley.com](mailto:jerimae@jmrowley.com)