HACKING THE MEETING DRAGON

From Crisis to Opportunity

RulesDoneRight.com

Slaying the Meeting Dragon

From Crisis to Opportunity

The legendary dragons terrorized the communities, tying up resources and restricting their movements. That was until the knights would go to battle and save the communities from the fierce dragons. In the business world of today, it is the ever-feared business meeting that holds organizations back for accomplishing their goals with civility.

The current unprecedented times can be viewed as a crisis or an opportunity. Crisis has the effect of revealing organizational flaws, often in evident in the way meetings are managed. This crisis will pass in time, but the world will never return as it was. The organizations that succeed will those that learn during this crisis and find solutions to their flaws. Those will be the ones to slay their meeting dragons.

About the Author:

After 37 years of working as an engineer in the high-tech world of semiconductor design and manufacture, I have retired to be a Professional Registered Parliamentarian with the National Association of Parliamentarians. In addition to my work as a consulting parliamentarian, I am vice-chairman of Collin County Parks Foundation Advisory Board and member of Plano Senior Advisory Board Decisions Consulting was created with the intent to help people and organizations with the tools required to make better decisions.

Steven Bolen, PRP
Decisions Consulting
www.RulesDoneRight.com
Steven@RulesDoneRight.com

Facts about that Meeting Dragon

1 **Organizations have Too many meetings**
- American Businesses hold 11 million meetings a day, 220 million a year
- Senior executives report spending an average of 23 hours per week in meetings

2 **Spending Too much Time in Meetings**
- Organizations spend 15% of their time in meetings
- Time spent in meetings is growing by 10% per year

3 **Workspaces are Poorly Equipped for Meetings**
- 73% of meetings are 2-4 people but 53% of conference rooms are for more than seven people
- 40% of employees waste 30 minutes a day looking for a place to meet

4 **Attendees aren't pay attention**
- 92% of people multitask during meetings
- 69% of people check their email during meetings
- 49% admit to doing non-work tasks

5 **Meeting Material is Poorly Presented**
- Only 37% of meetings use an agenda
- 90% of information is transmitted to the brain visually.

6 **All these Meetings interfere with work**
- 65% say meetings stop them from finishing their work
- 71% consider meetings unproduction and inefficient

Executives consider more than 67% of meetings failures

How would the rate yours?

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Running Better Meetings

1

Find the Right Facilitator

"The presiding officer of an assembly should be chosen prinicipally for the ability to preside" --- Robert's Rule of Order Newly Revised.

In general, meetings are facilitated by the person who calls the meeting, either based on the person's job title or being subject matter expert. Neither position being based on being good at facilitating meetings. Find a facilitator with the right training and temperament to lead the meeting.

2

Avoid Stonehenge

Buillt by an unknown society for unknown purposes, Stonehenge continues to stand and be visited by million of tourists each year. Are your meetings monuments like Stonehenge? Developed by unknown people in the past for purposes unknown but continue to be held because "we have always done it this way"? Take a new look at your meeting schedule and determine if they represent the present needs.

3

Using the Right Agenda

Studies show that only 37% of meetings have an agenda and likely many of those agenda are really just a listing of the presentation slides rather than a thought out agenda. Aimless meetings can waste large amounts of time.

4
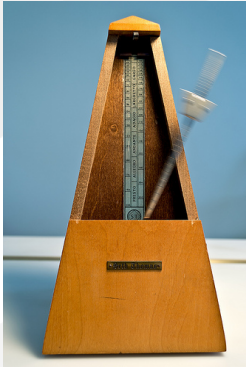
Result oriented Agendas

Nothing breeds success like success. Likewise in meetings nothing breeds accomplishments like accomplishments. Building an agenda with the most likely success items first will encourage success on later items.

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Improving Meeting Schedules

5

Develop a Cadence

To keep an organization running smoothly, it is necessary to develop an organization communication cadence. As the communication cycles, it give context to the process of when things get done and when the next update will be coming.   By synchronizing the group at a regular basis, members are less likely to get off the common path.   Leaving it too long will allow members to wander away from the strategic plan with wasted effort.

6

The Hallway Huddle

Coordination within a group often needs to happen more than the weekly status review cycle. The Hallway Huddle has been a suggestion where members of the group get together informally to review the current status each morning in the hallway or break area. Coordination of activities can be done without management and without structure among a small team.

7

The Daily Reset

In organization requiring a more top-down structure and working in an environment where the overall persepective in the project is limited, a daily reset by management with status updates and the day's issues and tasks can be useful to get everyone synchronized as to the efforts of the day. Doing the Daily Reset on a set timetable helps produce the cadence that can help an organize work smoothly.

8

Schedule Blocking

According to studies, the most common time for a meeting is 11am with the second being 2pm. Maximize the productivity of the group by scheduling the meetings at the beginning or ending of the day depending of the meeting purpose. Can the meetings be scheduled so that the maximum uninterrupted block of time exists in the middle of the day and that non-work hours are least affected.

9

Avoid GroupThink

Irving Janis defined groupthink as "a drive for consensus at any cost that suppresses dissent and appraisal of alternatives in cohesive decision-making groups." As groups work together, they will tend to more and more groupthink. It has led to numerous disastrous decisions, so each group must actively work at preventing it happening. Doing the same thing every time is the wrong approach. Change up your meetings, change your feedback methods and let everyone provide input to the issue.

10

Its more than a PowerPoint Deck

Central to most meetings in the business world today is the ubiquidious powerpoint deck. Too many meeting faciliators get stuck in going through the slides, paying more attention to them than the attendees. This method loses the attention of the audience and reaches only 1 of the 4 learning styles. Get away from the screen, put aside the computer and use the white board while engaging everyone in a discussion.

11

Avoiding First Selection Bias

Studies in election science have shown that the first entry on any ballot gains an additional 8-10% simply due to being first. Same is true in meetings, the first suggestion is taken more often simply because it is first. The path of least resistance is to accept the first idea and implement it. Often the discussion on the first item will get too detailed and the meeting time will run out before consideration of any additional ideas. Brainstorm all ideas first before delving into any details.

12

Empowering the Timid

It is a common experience in group meetings when the most senior member puts out a suggestion and the junior members won't challenge it. In order to get more input from all the team members, it is useful to take inputs from the least empowered to the most empowered so that the "experts" go last and everyone's voice can be heard.

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Creating More Effective Outcomes

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The Network Map

In any organization there are a few key influencers who greatly affect the operation, morale and productivity of the group. Gain the trust and getting those players on board to any new program or change early will make the rest of the project go smoothly. Who are the influencers in your social network?

18

Opening the Aperture

Through what lens does the organization view the problems? The longer teams work together the more likely that they will develop the habit of seeing the world through a small lens. Investing in tools like Red Teaming or "" can help the organization broaden its aperture and see the challenges in a more fruitful way.

19

Feel of the Cloth

In the days of Napolean, the armies lined up in close ranks such that each soldier could feel the cloth of the adjacent soldier. They found courage and strength from being part of the team. In what ways is your organization bonding such that each member feels the cloth of the others. Especially critical in times of working remotely. Leaving them feeling isolated can be discouraging.

20

The Say-Do Gap

If you polled the members of the organization would they perceive a gap between what the leaders say and what the leaders do? Nothing saps the morale more than a negative perception of the leadership.

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Effective Large Group Meetings

Flaws in larger meetings of 30-100 people such as department or group meetings can have higher costs in time and impact so special considerations should be taken.

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The 800 Pound Gorilla

There is always that controversial or hot topic issue which needs to be addressed. Preplanning so that the question is asked in the Q&A session let the leader address the issue without making it an overly important part of the meeting agenda.

18

Eliminate the Awkward Silences

The department meeting comes to an end and the presenter ask for questions, followed by that awkward silence. This silence is usually ended with one to two possible outcomes, no questions get asked or unimportant off-topic question. The value of the Q&A session gets lost. Solve this by prearranging the first question. On topic and to the point. Positive value questions will follow.

19

Be Real and Be Live

Organizations need to believe and develop trust in their leaders. Trust is best created when the leader relates to his team with human qualities and in person. Beware of recorded and remote department meetings as they don't create the trust required. It's not a performance but connect as a real human being.

20

Tell a Story

Why are TED talks so powerful? The talks use a standard format which is always centered around a story. Notice that all religious texts are centered around narrative stories. Using stories naturally locks the listener's attention and those stories are far more likely to be remembered.

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Effectiveness in remote meetings

The current crisis has most organizations working remotely which has its own issues which need to be addressed.

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Management Connections

Organizations who primarily work remoted were surveyed and 81% were found to have failed to have 1:1 with their direct manager in the past month. Managers have to make a point to reach out, especially to the digitally introverted, to make connections and provide both feedback and feedforward.   One of the challenges of these meetings is that the group members need both unstructured time for connecting and a structured agenda to assure all the boxes get ticked.

22

Most Effective Choice of Media

Studies show that peole multitask 57% of the time on audio calls from home, while only 4% of the time on video calls.   Use Video conference applications whenever possible as it more successful at keep the attention of the attendees. The video and audio connections of the video conference call gets around the missing non-verbal aspects of interpersonal communication which is so often misinterpreted.

23

Being Human

Making the human connections lets everyone know that we are all in this together. In this time of crisis, it is more important than usual to make sure that the difficulties of circumstances be addressed.   Limited communications to work issues doesn't address the fear and frustration that everyone is experiencing.

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The Digitally Insecure

Don't forget that not everyone in an organization has equal experience and facilities for remote work. Reaching out to those who may need more help or may need some additional equipment will help the insecure be more a part of the group.   Remote groups often experience 15% of the organization will drift off with minimal interconnectivity with the rest.

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Achieving the Ultimate Goal

The Desirable Meeting

Information on how to run better meetings is everywhere in the form of books, guides and training classes. 72% of organizations admit to having in-house training programs on having better meetings. The ultimate goal of any meeting improvement program is to move an organization from having meetings people have to attend to have meetings people want to attend.

So why are meetings still so bad. Respondents report that 67% of meetings as bad. The word meeting usually brings up negative feelings in most groups. Feelings of having your life suck right out of you.   They remember the frustration, fruitlessness and sheer boredom of the last meetings they encounter.   Most will walk into the meeting room thinking of the work they have to do, the lunch that is awaiting or the tireless people they will have to encounter.

You have at most 60 seconds from the beginning of a meeting until the attendees' attention will be lost. In fact, start late and some have already been lost before the meeting even starts. So can you make those 60 seconds be meaningful. Can you grab their attention and hold it long enough to get them involved in the meeting before they check out?

Take interest in those key items:

1) Have a meeting facilitator who knows what they are doing

2) Have a Meeting Agenda that is well thought out and designed

3) Make eye contact and connect with the attendees on a human level

4) Tell A Story. Everyone loves a story

5) Don't let the higher-level employees dominate

6) Always have integrity

Try some of the ideas and see if things don't go better.

Need Help?   Don't hesitate to connect with us at Decisions Consulting. We can help answer many questions and help guide you to having better meetings and a more efficient workplace.

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Achieving the Ultimate Goal

Key Strategies to Slaying the Dragon

DO'S

Plan for Success	✓
Develop a Cadence	✓
Think Broadly	✓
Empower the Timid	✓
Be Human	✓

DON'TS
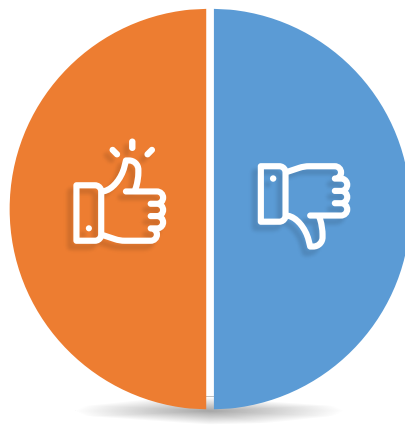
✗	Stonehenge Meetings
✗	Excessive Meetings
✗	Traditional Methods
✗	Forget the Introverts
✗	Hide behind Email

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