



DO THESE MYTHS MAKE YOUR MEETINGS MISERABLE?

You can hold effective meetings and become a more successful leader if you avoid these seven monsters. Here's how.

> Myth 1: Executives belong in meetings.

Although the demands of business cause executives to attend more meetings than other professionals, executives should be very selective on which meetings they attend. Top management is responsible for vision, strategy, plans, and communication. That means wise executives spend most of their time thinking, learning, planning, and communicating. Inefficient, ineffective meetings waste the time of the company's most valuable employees.

Better: Ask probing questions when invited to make sure that your presence will add value. For example, "What are your goals for the meeting?" "How will I contribute to achieving those goals?" and "How can I prepare for the meeting?" After all, you want to contribute to an effective meeting if you decide to attend.

> Myth 2: Holding a large meeting is impressive.

Actually, holding a large meeting is expensive. It can also be impressive if it is conducted properly, which means that it will be as small as possible.

Better: Invite only those who can make meaningful contributions. The likelihood of holding an effective meeting diminishes with groups larger than ten or twelve.

> Myth 3: Structure inhibits spontaneity.

This is true if your goal is to obtain random outcomes over infinite time. While this may occasionally produce spectacular results, such as winning a lottery, you can achieve predictable results faster by applying structured activities. These help people make methodical progress toward results. Otherwise, the group is attending a party, instead of working in a meeting.

Better: Use structured activities to keep you in control of your meeting and make progress toward results.

> Myth 4: People are too busy to prepare agendas.

Since there is always time to repeat a task, fix a problem, or make an apology, there must be time to take the steps that avoid such dilemmas. Overall, preparing an agenda saves time and money.

Better: Prepare an agenda or, if you are too busy, ask someone to do it for you. Then send the agenda to the participants so that they can prepare for the meeting.

> Myth 5: Minutes are unnecessary.

This is true for any meeting where people wasted time producing nothing. Effective meetings produce results that are worth documenting. Minutes serve to track action items, record decisions, and inform others. If you are planning a meeting with no results worth documenting, ask yourself why that meeting is necessary.

Better: Record key ideas, agreements, and action items during the meeting. Then convert these notes into minutes.

> Myth 6: Meetings should last a long time.

While this may be true for some meetings, most meetings can be conducted in less than an hour. Long, casual meetings lull people into lethargy. In general, people are able to focus on a task for 30 to 60 minutes. Then their attention fades and they take mental holidays to think about other things.

Better: Plan meetings where you spend time and resources in proportion to the value of the results. That is, an effective meeting should be designed to earn a profit. Also, plan short breaks every 50 minutes.

> Myth 7: The effectiveness of meetings is a low priority.

This is true if you seldom hold meetings. Of course, if you have more than two employees, you need meetings to make decisions, reach agreements, and develop solutions. Effective meetings are a critically essential activity in running a business. They harness the combined wisdom of your staff to invent products, increase sales, improve productivity, plan strategies, and create success.

Better: Learn how to plan and conduct meetings that make your business a success.