



CLIMB OUT OF THE BOX OF BAD MEETINGS - HOW TO HOLD EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Out of the box thinking is a popular fad today. And yet, in order to leave a box, you have to realize that you are in one.

For example, the Indians who lived in the Grand Canyon believed the entire world was like the canyon. And so they didn't try to find Kansas. This can be okay, if you're in a beautiful place like the Grand Canyon.

It can be a rut, however, if you're stuck in bad meetings.

For example, many leaders truly believe that it is normal to spend hours in a meeting engaged in pointless chit chat. Some believe that a meeting should be conducted like a Medieval court where the subjects listen while the boss talks. Others even believe that a group of people will be able to guess the purpose of a meeting without receiving a hint, like an agenda.

They may be like the VP who left his staff meeting after it had gone on for 30 minutes to ask his assistant, "Do you remember why I called this meeting?"

Or the manager who invited 30 software experts to a two-day meeting in Houston (actually a \$50,000 argument) with no agenda because he didn't want to "spoil the spontaneity by imposing a structure."

Or the manager who was told to reduce the number of meetings that he held and responded by calling an all-day meeting to figure out how.

All of these executives are working inside a very small, very unproductive box.

Instead, they should climb out of the box and run their meetings like a business. They should:

1) Have a Plan.

Every meeting should have an agenda.

Your agenda should begin with a clear, complete statement of the result that you want. Begin by writing out your goal for the meeting. Then study it. Review it. And revise it until it reflects exactly what you want.

Let's play with a simple example. Suppose your goal was to reduce the budget. Now, is that what you really want to do? Would a better goal, for example, be something like: figure out how to reduce spending on utilities, or reduce the cost of materials, or maintain productivity without buying new equipment? Notice that these goals reduce the budget while producing results more valuable than simply making numbers smaller. Of course, your goal will depend upon your situation and what you want to accomplish.

Once you have the goal, then plan activities that will accomplish it. Most meetings are conducted using a discussion, which is the least effective process for reaching agreements and making decisions. Instead, use activities that equalize participation and lead to consensus.

2) Earn a Profit.

Most meetings produce a loss. That is, the cost of the meeting exceeds the value of what it produces.

Begin by estimating the value of the result that you want from your meeting. If the value seems low or uncertain, then ask yourself if a meeting is warranted. Perhaps, it would be more cost effective to write a memo, make a phone call, or visit the manager next door.

Then design your meeting so that you earn a profit. Estimate the cost by multiplying your budgeted labor rate by the number of participants multiplied by the length of the meeting. Add the costs of travel, services, and materials.

Finally, compare the cost with the value. If the cost, exceeds the value, change the scope of the meeting.

Staying in the box, may be okay for executives who want to play make-believe games with their time. But those leaders who want to be part of the future will run their meetings like a business.