

# The staff treats admins like doormats: How do we get respect?

**Question:** "How can I handle other staff who treat administrative assistants as the low people on the totem pole? Where I work, admins get little or no respect from staff/peers. When we ask people to leave a conference room because we have booked it for a meeting, we are ignored or told to wait. Our bosses treat us fine, but it is other staff above and equal to us who treat us poorly. What can we do to institute a change?" — *Anonymous*

## Comments

Sometimes Admins let themselves be treated like doormats. I believe that being assertive is the way to handle this. When you ask a meeting to vacate the conference room, you should be speaking to the person in the room with the most authority. Does your office keep a published schedule for the conference room? If so, refer to that schedule as a reminder when you ask the group to vacate the room. Also let your boss know what you are doing. Although your boss respects you, he may have no knowledge of what you are experiencing and should know so you can be backed up.

Assertiveness is the key to this issue. There is acceptable office behavior and you should expect nothing less. Perhaps a seminar in assertive training is in order for the admins.

**Posted by: Exec. Admin with a lot of experience | February 29, 2008 at 02:23 PM**

I agree. Is your boss in these meetings? Maybe you talk to him about your issue with the conference room. Your plan could be 15 minutes before the meeting is up you will quietly go up to him and let him know "the 15 minute warning". Then he can maneuver the conversations and meeting to a close. If it runs 5 minutes over, not a big deal. Important decisions are usually made in a group meeting that are vital to the company. Just becoming more assertive and changing your habits could help. If your boss isn't in the meeting I suggest going to the person in charge of the meeting prior and tell them you will discretely make him aware there is only 15 minutes left, and for the meeting to close on time would be a great help to you. Being assertive can also mean stating your needs in a polite user friendly manner. If you go in there with an everybody out attitude no one will respond or respect that. After a few meetings, when you come in people will start to realize why and wrap it up.

**Posted by: Jocelyn | February 29, 2008 at 02:35 PM**

You need the backup of your boss. If people are disrespecting you in this way, your boss needs to step-in since it is his/her office you are representing. If you are treated as "less" it is probably happening to others as well, which is certainly not conducive to company success and values need to be instituted in that company. But until then...When a group does not leave a conference room on time, I respectfully let them know that the attendees to the next meeting are coming in and they have two-minutes to finish up. I have confronted my peers, which is

hard and stressful, but it does change how they treat me and I feel better standing up for myself. It is a sad fact that we teach others how to treat us because it takes a lot of energy and we have to take a bold stand, which can be very uncomfortable for some people. I recommend reading Life Scripts that you can buy through Skill Path because it takes these types of situations and gives you the dialogue you can use and prepares you for different responses. Best to you.

**Posted by: Anita T. | February 29, 2008 at 03:01 PM**

Our unwritten policy is that the first one to book the room gets it first, unless the City Council wants to meet, because they are a priority over all other meetings. If your meeting is not scheduled, you stand a chance of getting kicked out for another meeting. We have a schedule on the door of who gets the room and for how long. My personal experience is having someone higher up than me telling me what to do, when they have no business doing so. But as soon as my boss found out, it stopped. Our bosses are pretty protective of their admin assistants. And no one tells them what to do unless they ask the boss for permission first. And depending on who is asking, they've probably blown their chance and will get turned down. If you have more than one meeting area, our smaller groups will take the smaller meeting areas, larger groups take the Council Chambers, but one person does all the scheduling, so we know who to ask for permission. So, if someone gets booted from their meeting room after having scheduled it, they had better have a really good reason why.

**Posted by: DE | February 29, 2008 at 03:39 PM**

I would let my boss know what is going on but try to handle it myself. Ask for their support and let them know you'll keep them in the loop but you may need them as back up. If the admins are asked by anyone to do anything close to when the your meetings are taking place, remind them of your scheduled meeting and that your group will be waiting outside the conference room at the scheduled time. Their projects will be on hold until your meeting is scheduled to end.

Then if the previous meeting runs late, wait right outside the room for them to finish, hold your meeting, wrap up by the scheduled end time and reschedule the room for the next available opening. Send out an e-mail to your bosses (keep them in the loop) and to the folks who made your meeting late letting them know of the added time and the reason.

Something like this: "Due to the conference room delay, the admin group needed to rebook the room in order to conclude our business. All projects will be on hold during . Please plan accordingly."

Act like Gandhi. Stand up for yourself peacefully but assertively. It's important to wait outside the room as a group. Hold you meeting in the waiting area if you like. Once the interlopers realize they are being "ignored or told to wait" during your scheduled conference room meeting time (just like you are being told) they will learn to wrap it up on time or schedule more time for their meeting.

**Posted by: Sarah | February 29, 2008 at 04:15 PM**

People treat others with disrespect when they are allowed to treat others with disrespect. I would discuss this with your boss, and have that person make a point to tell those involved that when they are told the conference room is booked for an appointment, they have 1 minute to wrap it up and leave, no exceptions. I think these people who are being rude and disrespectful need to be reminded that you are doing your job, and being disrespectful about these issues will not be tolerated.

**Posted by: Mark | March 03, 2008 at 12:29 PM**

To me this seems like the "tempest in the teapot". Does this disrespect extend to other aspects of your work, or just the conference room? If it's just the conference room follow Sarah's suggestion. If the disrespect is in other aspects of your work my suggestion would be to have all of the admins collectively ask for a meeting with your HR department (if you have one) and let HR deal with the bosses. The bosses should be reminded that disrespect can escalate into "fostering a hostile workplace" which could lead to legal action. And remember: you can only be "inferior" if you allow yourself to be "inferior."

**Posted by: Anon | March 03, 2008 at 02:28 PM**

No one is disrespected, unless given permission. Always be tactful, respectful, then expect no less.

You can say, we appreciate how you allow us our allotted time for our meeting. We will have access for two hours. If you still need to continue your meeting we will be glad to notify you when we are done.

Say this as you proceed into the meeting area.

**Posted by: Marie | March 11, 2008 at 12:32 PM**

Bologna, I am an administrative assistant and I know exactly what she is referring to. It goes WAY past meeting rooms!

**Posted by: You're correct! | March 14, 2008 at 02:33 PM**

Respect! That is something that is earned. People tend to treat you the way they are treated, I always try to remember this when dealing with co-workers. Rather you are on the top of the totem pole, as you say, or not, you receive the same respect you give...maybe this is a good place to start looking for answers. What could it hurt?

**Posted by: Sandy | March 17, 2008 at 10:26 AM**