How to run productive project meetings

Developing project management skills can be a powerful way for administrative assistants to get ahead at work. Stan Portny, author of *Project Management for Dummies,* has been writing about improving the efficiency of company meetings and employee collaboration for more than 20 years. We recently asked him a few questions about the best ways to organize and delegate tasks when you're in the role of project manager. Here's what he had to say.

APT: What do people commonly get wrong when they're trying to lead a project meeting?

Portny: They fail to get the right people in the room. The people with the authority required to make decisions on issues to be addressed at the meeting do not attend the meeting, people with needed knowledge and/or support are not present, and people who do not need or want to be there are present.

APT: What should a project manager do when she's running the project, but not the most senior member on the project team?

Portny: In this situation, the individual running the project meeting is often concerned that the more senior person does not view her actions as being insubordinate as she attempts to move the meeting along. In general, telling people at the outset what your intentions are and being sure throughout the meeting to guide and suggest, rather than to direct and tell people what to do, will help you accomplish this.

Specific ways you can do this include the following: When the meeting begins, state what you hope to accomplish and explain why you believe that these are goals that both you and the participants share. Ask people if they are willing to be responsible for a task, rather than arbitrarily assigning the task to them.

This means you should have strong reasons why you feel the person is especially qualified to perform the job and why it would be in her interest to work on it.

APT: What else should project managers know about running productive project meetings?

Portny: Always keep a list of topics to be addressed and their planned start and finish times in full view for everyone to see throughout the meeting.

Keep the list of action items and people responsible for them in full view throughout the meeting. And keep meetings as short as possible. Less than or equal to one hour is a good length for most meetings.