

Myth: Meetings are a waste of time

Let's just wait one second here before we start our daily bashing of supposedly time-wasting meetings, shall we? Consider these advantages of even the ones that feel so very slobby and pointless:

They force people together.

The natural inclination of many workers is to disappear into their own workspaces and silos, shutting out the world. Meetings make people remember the social contract that gives an office its energy and the human element that forges meaningful bonds. The more people we interact with daily, even on an elementary level like sitting among them in a meeting, the tougher it becomes to feel isolated, disconnected and indifferent.

They take the focus off us.

Meetings are a good reminder that the company does not necessarily revolve around only our own goals and ambitions. It's helpful to keep in touch with the fact that a business has many cogs, and that each person represents one of them. Interdepartmental knowledge and insight increases naturally by listening to others speak about their issues, creating empathy for the difficulties they face.

Ideas will just happen.

When people gather, conversational topics become less predictable, and often issues are brought up organically that might otherwise fester in silence. The shyest people can find themselves emboldened to respond to a sudden exchange that touches upon their wheelhouse, or to suggest an idea they'd been quietly sitting on.

Try these techniques to make your meetings more valuable

Replace status-update meetings with mini-debates

If your weekly departmental meetings simply consist of time-wasting status updates by employees, take the time to spark big-picture debates. Possible question starters: What has changed? What big risks do we face? What mistakes are we making? What data do we wish we had?

Want your meeting to start on time?

If certain people tend to arrive late for meetings, suggest these cures to your boss:

Put the most important item on the agenda first, with a time limit. ("Budget Concerns From All Departments: 9:00-9:15.")

Suggest that your boss start meetings on time, instead of waiting for stragglers. After a few such sessions, people will learn to arrive on time.

Suggest that your boss sit facing the entrance door to the meeting room and look directly at latecomers. When people realize that the boss is noticing their tardiness, they may start to arrive on time.

Ask your boss to summarize what has happened to each person who arrives late at the meeting. This tactic focuses attention on latecomers and exerts subtle pressure for them to arrive on time.