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Managing Meaningful And Profitable Meetings

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If you could be an ant under the coffee machine in your office, my bet is you would hear more complaints about the drudgery, wasted time and foolishness of meetings than any other topic. What's interesting is that leaders in general think that the meetings they call are relevant and we'll run. If the truth be known, their subordinates who attend these meetings would have different views.

Your meetings are a perfect place to introduce your business coach as the person helping you enhance your own meeting practices. If you do this, your staff will all but cheer and you will position yourself to gain many insights into the dynamics between the people attending your meetings. Having a coach working with you and your team right on site during your meetings allows him or her to observe for interpersonal dynamics going on between your staff that likely impact your team's productivity and your company's profitability.

It also positions your coach as a helper to you and your entire team if you make him or her available to your staff members to support them in enhancing their own meetings. Seeing that effective meetings are important to you as their leader will create motivation to enhance their own meetings.

Across the world, the expensive hourly rates of executives, managers and staff member spent in unproductive, demoralizing meetings is far too high. This waste of human capital, time, and money can be turned around as you implement the tips below.

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE PURPOSE, GOALS AND OUTCOMES FOR THE MEETING -

Determine if the use of a meeting strategy is the best strategy for achieving the proposed meeting goals and outcomes. Too many time-wasting meetings are scheduled because within a company's culture it has been a tradition to hold regular meetings. Often the same information sharing scheduled for the meeting agenda can be accomplished by phone or e-mail, often more efficiently and effectively.

Is your meeting being held to make a decision, discuss and resolve a problem or brainstorm business opportunities? What ever the goals you want achieved through the meeting process, make sure the meeting strategy is the best strategy for achieving them. Also make sure you have prioritized your goals so the most important get addressed first. Invite to the meeting only the people who really need to be there and are in a position to significantly contribute to the achievement of the goals addressed at the meeting.

ASSIGN A MEETING FACILITATOR - If it's not you, ask one of your team members to facilitate the meeting. I like rotating meeting facilitators so that the meeting process is owned by the group. Somebody has to be in charge of facilitating the meeting to ensure that it

accomplishes what it's meant to accomplish. Decide this before the meeting is called.

HAVE A MEETING PLAN - Create an agenda for the meeting and distribute it, in advance, to everyone who will be attending. Ask them to provide you with any changes or additions to the agenda in advance. I like having approximate time allotted and expected outcomes listed next to each goal on the meeting agenda sheet. This keeps things moving and input relevant and on task.

DETERMINE THE MOST APPROPRIATE TIME - Too early in the morning and you risk people being late because of traffic. Too close to lunch and they're thinking of food. Too close to the end of the day and they're thinking of going home. Find that "just right" time, normally in the mid-morning or afternoon works well..

MEET IN AN EASY-TO-FIND LOCATION - Pick a "common ground" for most of the participants. If a meeting will be held off-site or involves getting people to your location, provide clear, concise directions.

FOLLOW THE PLAN - You have a goal-driven agenda, everyone at the meeting has seen it, so stick to it. If a goal is not appropriate for addressing at the meeting, table it for another time.

KEEP THE GROUP FOCUSED - Side conversations or irrelevant topics will always emerge, especially as the sociability level and number of attendees increases. Help each participant feel responsible for maintaining proper control of the meeting and keeping everyone focused on the goals you are trying to achieve within the time limits established for achieving them. A posted set of agreed upon governing operating values for meeting participants helps people stay focused.

CREATE A "PARKING LOT" FOR ISSUES OUTSIDE YOUR AGENDA - Some issues, while not appropriate to your specific meeting, do need to be dealt with. When these issues come up, take note of them on a chart or chalk board, handle them person to person after the meeting, or develop them into a goal to be addressed at a future meeting.

END ON TIME - Keep to your original meeting plan, agenda goals and time limits. If you find you can't achieve all of the meeting goals, schedule another meeting. If you don't finish on time it's either because you didn't stick to your agenda, people failed to stay focused, you underestimated the time allotment for each item, or one or more of the meeting goals on your agenda really needed the extra time and attention a second meeting will give them..

FOLLOW THROUGH - When participants sit through a meeting, discuss issues, reach conclusions and make recommendations only to see nothing come of it, frustration skyrockets and morale tumbles! Follow through on all suggestions and recommendations and don't forget your "parking lot" issues. If participants in the meeting have specific follow through responsibilities, spell them out in writing and have them let you know when their responsibilities have been fulfilled. This keeps mutual accountability high to ensure that the goals worth

addressing at meetings are in fact worth achieving.

Let participants know specifically how their particular contributions to the meeting were appreciated. Email and quick notes are excellent for doing this. In writing, let participants know the specific action steps that will be taken as a result of the meeting. Also let them know clearly and logically the reasons recommendations that were made at the meeting are not being followed.

If you need help in mastering and implementing any of the skills and tactics mentioned, I'm here for you! Please visit the Call-A-Coach section of my web site for more information.

About the author:

Dr. Mac shares with business owners the practical knowledge and insights he gained as a small company CEO. He founded Sycamore Ranch, Inc. when 27 and as CEO led his partners and a staff of 100 for 16 years in developing and operating the 50 acre recreational facility. Years later, he integrated what he learned from his Doctoral program at USC with his practical business experiences and began consulting. For four decades Mac's coached business owners in mastering and applying "how to" leadership and managerial skills for: Hiring and retaining only the top ten percent producers; Optimally deploying and supervising staff to maximize their personal motivation; Developing high integrity leadership teams; Facilitating mutual performance accountability and peer coaching processes; and, Integrating his Intentional Business Integrity Process into their company operations. Mac has served leaders in manufacturing and high tech companies; accounting, banking and insurance enterprises; medical and health care organizations; service and retail oriented businesses; as well as educational, governmental and non profit organizations. Q&A ProActive Leadership 888-648-5552 or MacAdam@PALConsulting

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