

## Why We All HATE Meetings

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"I could get so much more done if I didn't have to go to so many meetings!" Sound familiar? It is fascinating to me how it is nearly universally accepted that most leaders wish they had fewer and more effective meetings, but so little is done to fix this frustration.

There are several reasons we hate meetings. Let's start with the obvious: there really are too many meetings.

Too often leaders do not take the time to question if a particular meeting is even necessary. Are there only a few items that need to be clarified and disseminated? Could that have been accomplished in an email? So why wasn't it?

One simple solution is to continuously ask ourselves if a particular meeting is absolutely necessary.

Many meetings are necessary, but that does not mean they have to be two or more hours long. That's another reason we hate meetings... they are so much longer than necessary to get the job done.

If I leave one small mark on the Air Force, I hope it is "Pelkey's Law" – 50 minutes, then a 10 minute break.

You may be spelling out the exact way to cure cancer, end world hunger, or convert dirt to gold, but I promise you, after 50 minutes, nobody is listening! Yet we continue to blow right through that necessary break.

The fear that it takes too long to get everyone back together is wrong. Start exactly on the hour (or half hour). They'll be back on time once they know you don't deviate from the schedule.

Sometimes meetings run too long because whoever is running the meeting doesn't re-direct the "squirrel" conversations.

An occasional "squirrel" (especially if it adds a little humor) is ok, but we need to make sure we are disciplined in our meetings.

Similarly, it takes skill to respectfully but assertively turn off the "pontificators" who are either lost in their passion for the topic, dying to show how bright and deserving of attention they are, or who just love the sound of their own voice.

It takes skill to reign them in by saying things like, "let's take that off-line" or "that's a longer discussion than we have time for now."

Meetings are more productive and efficient if the leader keeps things on track. One recommendation: if you're a "talker" like me, consider having a timekeeper who ruthlessly watches the clock and keeps you on track.

We also need to insist that participants come prepared to meetings. This is one of my pet peeves. I have watched countless leaders allow briefers to read their slides to them (and everyone else in the room). Stop them!

One of my favorite stories I recently heard from a co-worker was about a major general who stopped a breifer who was reading slides to him. "Stop. What do I need to know?" When the breifer started reading again, he stopped them again. "I need to know why you are here to brief. Talk to me, not the slides!"

He made it crystal clear to all in the room that his expectation was briefers come prepared and they only elaborate on the bullets during their briefings – no reading allowed! The briefer had to know their information well enough to brief the big picture without slides.

Bottom line: Let's meet less...so we have time to do more.