

“Meetings....Meetings....Meetings”

I was just reading the Dilbert comic where Alice was asked to read the minutes from their last meeting. Her response was, “People said irrelevant things. Bad Decisions were made”. Or the cartoon “Close to Home” where there is a picture of people laying on the floor and hanging over the conference room desk and the caption reads, “To keep meetings from running indefinitely, conference rooms at Zartech Industries were allotted only a 45-minute supply of air.” Sometimes we have to wonder....what are these meetings all about!!

And here are some interesting quips about our meetings:

“A meeting is a gathering where people speak up, say nothing, then all disagree”

“A meeting is a place where you keep meetings and throw away hours”

“The best meeting is a group of three with one sick and the other out of town”

A 1989 study of 2000 business leaders by Harrison Conference Centers and Hofstra University reveals that unproductive meeting time has a direct cost to American business of more than \$37 billion a year. And I doubt that in 2002 much really has changed.

But of course, there are meetings that are very productive (please e-mail me if you attended one of these fine sessions and tell me what made it productive!!) I have actually attended meetings that were productive and this is what I found that made them that way.

1. They were very planned. People knew what to expect (before they got to the meeting) and the people that needed to make decisions were at the meetings.
2. There was an agenda and we stuck to the agenda. If side conversations occurred or people started off on a tangent the facilitator quickly brought us back on track. There was a facilitator!!!
3. Items were prioritized as to their importance and we knew how much time we were able to spend on the issue. We also knew if we were making a decision on something, whether it was informational or whether it was just our opinion someone was after.
4. If there was problem solving that needed to be done we had a system for solving the problem and coming up with a decision.
5. We had fun! There was humor and laughter. People were open and freely expressed their opinions.
6. We got something done! There was an action plan. Decisions were made and recorded as to who, was going to do what and by when.

These are just some of the ways that I have seen meetings run productively. How are your meetings going? Are they effective? Are the goals of the meeting clear? Does your group stay on track? Are you able to contribute to group ideas? Are you satisfied with your meetings? If you can answer yes to these questions you are on track. If not, well then it is never too late to implement some of these ideas for more effective meetings, meetings, meetings. (Did I say meetings???)