

Make your meetings magic!

Lee Cottier, 'Productivity Ninja' with specialist training and coaching company Think Productive, offers some alternative approaches to making sure your meetings are focused and productive

We all spend too many hours in meetings; the average UK employee spends over 14 hours a week in meetings, and half of these state that their time would have been spent more effectively on other areas of work.

Sadly we don't always get the return we expect. In a 2007 study by Bert van der Zwan (of internet company WebEx) 28% of middle managers said that reducing their number of face-to-face meetings would improve overall productivity at work, with a further 21% saying they would feel less stressed and 18% felt they would have a better work-life balance.

Now think how magnificent it would be if every single one of our meetings was powerful, purposeful and helped you make decisions which worked for you and for the common good. Yes, every meeting is a priceless opportunity to surprise ourselves with just how much we can achieve together. Here are a few tips to help you on your way.

Before, during and after

At Think Productive we're huge fans of the 40-20-40 model from the book "Meeting Together" by Lois Graessle, George Gawlinski and Martin Farrell. This proposes that only 20% of the value added by a meeting is down to what happens on the actual day. What goes before the meeting in terms of preparation, and after with

Every meeting is a priceless opportunity to surprise ourselves with just how much we can achieve together

purposeful follow-through and action are far more important. This can be a really helpful way to think about the overall time management and productivity aspect of meeting behaviours in your organisation, rather than simply the 20% in the middle: the meeting itself.

To this important framework we've added our own Think Productive "10P" checklist for productive meetings (see opposite for details).

Don't meet – Huddle!

Powerful meetings can be really short. Often our clients report that their regular monthly team meetings can last all day, and hour after hour is taken up with just sharing status and project updates, without actually moving onto new business.

In these circumstances one of the tools we recommend for small teams (we use it ourselves at Think Productive) is Verne Harnish's 'Daily Huddle', from his excellent book

"Mastering the Rockefeller Habits".

The Daily Huddle is a strictly timed 15 minute daily meeting that can happen either face to face or by conference call. The purpose of the Daily Huddle is alignment: to focus everyone on the bigger picture priority and remind us of what's going well... or needs improvement. The questions we use at Think Productive to frame the meeting (each person takes a turn) are:

- What's your good news?
- What are you working on?
- Where are we up to with the numbers and targets in the business?
- What are we stuck on?
- Are we OK for tomorrow's call, is anyone not here tomorrow?

You can customise the exact questions for your particular team and activity. But whether you're a small team in a charity or a multinational corporation, the focus is the same. It's great for bringing everyone together, reminding us what's most important and encouraging good communication. It's designed to create action and momentum. It also means that your less frequent more formal team meetings won't need to spend as much time just getting everyone up to speed – but instead can concentrate on key problem solving and decision making. For more information see: http://www.gazelles.com/columns/Daily_Meeting.pdf



The 10Ps of Productive Meetings

40% Before

- 1. **Preparation** – Meetings are a huge investment of resources, make sure you use this investment well by doing great preparation.
- 2. **Purpose** – Be very clear on what the meeting is intended to achieve, what your outcomes will be, and how you will know when you’ve finished.
- 3. **People** – Who really, really needs to be there? What’s the minimum set of people who can appropriately achieve the purpose?
- 4. **Place** – Environment matters. Consider how to minimise

travel time across the group, but don’t sacrifice convenience for inspiration. An unusual venue can help you escape from default thought patterns.

- 5. **Practicalities** – Have you provided everything your people will need to do the work on the day? Briefing packs, directions, accommodation, refreshments etc.

20% During

- 6. **Participation** – Create an environment and atmosphere where everyone feels able and encouraged to contribute.
- 7. **Pace** – The facilitator’s role is very

important, helping the group to stick to the purpose and not get sidetracked or distracted.

- 8. **Pause** – Build in points in the meeting where you can refocus and regroup, ensuring you are sticking to schedule but also that key points and decisions are recognised.

40% After

- 9. **Productive follow-through** – The time invested in the meeting will be wasted unless ACTION happens as a result!
- 10. **Plan** – Make sure who is accountable for what is recorded, and people commit to a timeframe for their action points.

See you in cyberspace

If you do need to bring several people together, do you really need it to be in person? The WebEx study revealed that employees believe 37% of the meetings they attend do not need to be conducted face-to-face, and that physical meetings can in fact be counter-productive. Teleconferencing used to be complicated and expensive, and almost as much hassle to arrange

as a physical meetup. Now with simple (and often free) tools it’s super-easy to arrange multi-party conference calls with screen sharing. Skype (<http://www.skype.com>) and JoinMe (<http://join.me>) are two favourites with the Think Productive team. They take minutes to setup and learn to use, and can save you hours.

Think Productive’s half day “Making Meetings Magic”

workshop will help you and your team get more out of your meetings, turning them from a pointless drain to a productive gain. For more details of this group workshop and the rest of our productivity training range visit www.thinkproductive.co.uk or telephone 0117 230 8655. Significantly discounted rates are offered especially for Education sector clients.