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## Meeting with a purpose: A manager's business skill

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Taking Charge

Eileen Connolly-Robbins

A study that looks at how people in leadership roles make use of their time found that top bosses typically spend 18 hours a week in meetings. That sounds like an awful lot, but I bet if you checked your own calendar you'd be surprised how much of your workweek is "booked."

Researchers at Harvard Business School and London School of Economics have been studying the schedules of CEOs to gain insight into how leaders manage their work time and what impact that may have on company performance. The researchers recently reported that CEOs are in meetings for about 18 hours of a typical 55-hour work week.

The study is bound to give ammo to the anti-meeting individuals who groan at the thought of gathering round the conference table. They argue that meetings are a waste of time and detract from getting real work done. We can all relate somewhat to those sentiments. Who hasn't been in a meeting lately that started late and dragged on with little sense of direction?

Defenders of meetings make the point that with so much of work these days conducted via emails and texts and other impersonal tools, face time among employees matters more than ever. Meetings can bring together colleagues from various divisions of an organization who otherwise would have little opportunity to interact. Creativity can emerge when a group gets together. Meetings can also allow company leaders to establish goals and build support for a shared vision.

So who's right? Both groups. Many meetings aren't productive, but some meetings are worth the time. The challenge is to think before you schedule. What do you hope to accomplish? Is a meeting the best way to get your desired result? Monthly status reports, for instance, probably don't require a meeting. The ability to video conference has made it easier to call a meeting, but that doesn't mean you necessarily should.

Here are some tips for getting the most out of meetings:

- n Distribute an agenda and relevant documents in advance. That allows participants a chance to submit thoughts ahead of time if they wish. Often times, meetings take off in one direction and counter points of view can fall by the wayside.

- n Begin on time so the meeting doesn't lose energy even before it gets going. State how long the meeting will last and how it will be organized: "We'll first spend 20 minutes on budget items," and so forth. In the same spirit, end on time.

- n If you called the meeting, you need to be in charge. Facilitate the discussion and don't let any one person dominate. Remember, you set the tone.

n Don't allow a meeting to become a place to put down coworkers. Honest critique of someone's work should be given in private. Likewise, meetings shouldn't be a place for employees to grandstand.

n Meetings aren't social events, so try to limit chit-chat.

n At the conclusion, summarize what was accomplished and state a future action plan if needed.

n If there's no longer a reason to hold a scheduled meeting, cancel it. Your colleagues will appreciate your respect for their time.

At Main Line Society of Professional Women (SPW) events, we do our best to make sure that you get the most out of the time you spend with us. By scheduling each portion of the event (i.e. networking, eating, presentation from the speaker, and Q&A), we make sure that you are able to effectively meet who you want to meet and learn what you want to learn as efficiently as possible...and have fun in the process! Don't miss our next event on April 17, where Reneé Amoore, a global leader and President and Founder of The Amoore Group will discuss how to develop your leadership style and successfully lead others. Visit us at [www.spwmainline.com](http://www.spwmainline.com) for more information or to register.

No matter what, don't let meetings take over the time that is required to cultivate your employees, develop new products and services, and grow your business by connecting with people outside your organization.

Don't forget spontaneous encounters. They can be the best meetings of all.

*Eileen Connolly-Robbins is executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Main Line Chamber of Commerce and founder of its Society of Professional Women.*

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