Why Are Meetings One Hour Long?
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The ruling paradigm on meetings is that they should be scheduled for one hour. If a manager sends a note to her administrative assistant to schedule a meeting sometime this week, he will instinctively assume the duration is one hour.

We come by this paradigm through convention, and it is an opportunity to challenge the status quo. Suppose the administration person scheduled the meeting for 50 minutes. What would be the outcome? In most organizations it would mean that everyone invited to the meeting saved at least 10 minutes. As a side benefit, the 50 minutes spent at the meeting would be far more productive because the standard paradigm has been broken.

There are numerous things that can be done to improve the time utilization at meetings, Here are seven of my favorite techniques;

Seven Antidotes:

1. Suggest that the person leading the meeting be extremely mindful of the duration. After all, what we have at work is our time.
2. Shock people into a realization of what is actually happening: Set up the meeting to start at 2:17 pm and end at 2:49 pm. That would be a 33 minute meeting (if my math is correct).
3. Put a premium on how the time is spent in meetings. Make sure the agenda is specific as to how much time will be devoted to each topic and stick to that schedule. Have a PITA assigned to keep things on track (PITA stands for Pain in the rear).
4. Acknowledge the need for important side issues, but do not let them derail the meeting. Handle them efficiently or find another venue to deal with them.
5. Start and end each meeting on time. Become known as a stickler for this. You can be courteous and bring stragglers up to speed on what has already been accomplished, but you are really enabling them to

continue the practice. It is not polite to others to arrive late for meetings. It is also not polite to attendees for the leader to extend beyond the advertised finish time.

6. Have a set of expected behaviors for your meetings and post them. Hold each other accountable for abiding by these rules. Here is a favorite rule of mine. It is expected that when someone feels we are spinning our wheels or not making the best use of time, he or she will give the "time out" signal to the person running the meeting (finger tips of one hand touching the palm of the other hand). Nobody will be punished in any way for making this sign. It simply calls the question as to whether we are spending our time wisely right now.
7. Have some time set aside in each meeting to reinforce good behavior and feel good about things that are going well. If we spend 100% of our time dealing with the bad stuff that needs to be fixed, we will never smell the roses.

All these rules are common sense. It is too bad they are not common practice, because they help preserve our most critical resource: our time.

The preceding information was adapted from the book The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, by Robert Whipple. It is available on **www.leadergrow.com**.

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