

Hello. This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you for tuning in as always. Today I want to talk about something kind of boring. I want to talk about meetings. We all have meetings in our companies. Some more than others, but I want to talk about some of the problems with meetings, how to do meetings right, and how to get the most out of them?

Depending on what survey you read, there's between, get this, 36 million and 56 million meetings a year. No, a day. A day. 36 to 56 million meetings a day in America. 2/3 of the people that go to these meetings upon survey say that the meetings were a waste of their time. 8% in a separate survey said that they'd rather have a root canal than go to a meeting at work.

Meetings aren't very effective. They're perceived as being big time wasters and all that. Now your meetings are a microcosm of your company's culture. If you're having ineffective meetings, that could be a warning sign that you've got a lot of inefficiency and ineffectiveness around the company. On the other hand, if you can improve your meetings, if you can make them snappy and tight and informative and make good decisions then that should have the opposite effect of improving your company's culture.

So, if you look at your meetings as a part of your company's culture, I think you'll see that they really are a bigger part and maybe deserve a little more time and effort than what you've been putting into them here lately.

So, why do people hate meetings? There's seven major reasons. There's too many meetings, they're too long, got the wrong people present or too many people present in the meeting and that renders them less effective. Poor meeting leadership or facilitation. Let's face it. A lot of our folks who run family businesses are terrific in so many aspects of their jobs, but maybe they're terrible meeting facilitators. Why not, among your team, surely you've got somebody that can run a meeting effectively. Maybe pass the buck and delegate that and have somebody else do it if you get the sense that your meetings aren't very productive.

Meetings interrupt other productive activities so people resent them for that reason. People use meetings for posturing and politicking and just showing off and things like that. The main reason people don't like meetings is that meetings conclude with no decisions made. No hard and fast decisions that are actionable coming. It's almost like meeting for the sake of meeting. That's the way we've always done it here. That's just one of the things that drives me berserk. That's the way we've always done it here.

You should be always reengineering your company. I don't care if you've had a meeting every Wednesday for the last 20 years. You really need to go to your people and find out what is going to be effective for them, what's going to make them happy, what's going to make them enthusiastic about attending. How can you change and adapt and reengineer so that you're getting more out of these meetings?

Why should you meet? You should have some meeting rhythm. There should be ... Maybe you do have a meeting every Wednesday. Here we have a meeting every Monday morning, and it's just part of our rhythm. We don't do 52 weeks a year. We probably get 40 weeks a year in, but they're regular and they're expected and if you're

not otherwise occupied, you're expected to attend the meeting. We have quarterly meetings too that are bigger in scope and scale and pretty much are all day meetings. Those are really the only two standing meetings we have. We have very few other unscheduled ad hoc meetings.

Meetings are important for coordination so everybody will know what everybody else is doing, what they're working on, what problems and challenges they have. There are good times to ask for help. Obviously in an organization, you've got people doing different things at different times, but along with coordination goes assistance and how can I help you, and I've got a problem over here. How can I help you with your problem over there?

When you have important guests come in then that's a good time for a meeting. To share and exchange information there. And of course training. Most of our clients do a good bit of training. Especially on safety and other essential things. Obviously that's an important time to have a meeting.

So, let me give you seven tips for how to make your meetings more effective. The first thing is start and end on time. Don't punish your punctual people who get there at 8:00AM for the meeting by waiting and twiddling your thumbs until 8:15 when the stragglers get there. Start your meetings on time. Run them effectively, and end them on time. Don't go over. If you have to go over with one or two people, you need more time with them, break up the big meeting and have a separate meeting with the people that you need in overtime.

The second thing is no cell phones and laptops in your meetings. I know people like to take notes on their laptops these days, but I sit in meetings, and I do presentations and I see people utterly disengaged because yeah, they were taking notes on their laptop, and then they got an email. Then they got distracted and had to go google some term or something. It ends up being a big mess so we banned cell phones and laptops from our meetings for that reason. If you've got to take a few notes and go type them in later, that's fine. That's really not that much trouble.

Have an agenda. Use a template, use a standard agenda, and then adapt, change, and make adjustments from there. Ask other people what they want to put on the agenda too. Don't just make it the same boring old agenda. What do other people in the organization need to hear about, learn about, talk about, fret about, whatever. Let them have some input into the agenda.

Encourage debate in your meetings. I don't know of anybody who loves conflict, but it's actually good to engender some conflict in your meetings because vigorous debate is good in companies. As long as we don't go away from the meeting feeling like we're worst enemies week after week after week, but if you've got some people who disagree with you, there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with a little bit of disagreement if it rises to the level of conflict, you might have a bit of a problem, but disagreement is fine. In fact, you should encourage it because disagreement almost always produces more optimal meetings and decisions in companies.

Don't be afraid to let people mix it up and vigorously debate topics in your meetings. Get everybody involved. You can't have one guy droning on and on and on. Get everybody involved and extract information from them. Call in the people that are a little quiet to get their viewpoints. Listen. Golly, Moses. That is one of the hardest things for our clients to do. I think they can listen pretty well I think when they're dealing with customers because we're all outward facing with the customers. We want to hear everything they're saying. Internally, I'm afraid, some of our leaders are terrible listeners, and they really don't hear and take action on the things their people are telling them.

Then the final tip is ABCD. I love this. I got this from a blog that my friend Cam Marston does, it's called What's Working with Cam Marston. If you're into podcasts, look it up. It's a good one. ABCD. Okay, A stands for actions. What actions are we going to take coming out of these meetings? B stands for By Whom. Who is going to be responsible, and therefore accountable, for the actions that are coming out? C is communicate. What decisions do we need to communicate coming out of the meeting? We blundered, I blundered here recently. We had a meeting and made some decisions and actually raised some prices and didn't communicate that out to the facilitators that actually engage with the customers and they were sort of blind sighted by the price increases, and I felt like a complete idiot. Here I am confessing to you, but I didn't communicate an item that clearly needed to be communicated just beyond the administrative staff here at the office.

The fourth item, the D, is decisions. What decisions did we make? We've decided, that's the D. We've decided to take the action, that's the A. By Whom is the B: who's responsible and who's accountable. And finally, what do we need to communicate out of this meeting? So ABCD. That will make your meetings more effective. I'd like to hear your other tips, too. What do you do in your shops that produce better meeting results, and what have you done where you've made blunders in the past like me? And you've had some negative outcomes. I'd like to hear both of those things.

This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you.