Article Side

3 Signs You Should Terminate a Meeting by Jimmie Flores

Article published on June 19th 2012 | Management

Many meetings are a waste of time. In other words, you meet simply to meet. Iâ€™ve had meetings where the main focus is to discuss a future meeting. Before scheduling the next business get-together, we must ensure that it will bring value to the organization. If not, donâ€™t schedule it. If itâ€™s already on the calendar, send a note to the participants explaining that it is no longer necessary.

Last Friday, I had a meeting scheduled with a colleague to assist me with a business problem. I awoke early on Friday, and reviewed my notes for the meeting. After an hour or so working on the issue, I realized a solution to my problem. With this information in hand, I emailed my colleague and informed her that the meeting was no longer necessary. I was surprised to read her reply: â€œJimmie, thank you for letting me know. By you solving the problem, we both now have the entire morning to work on other deliverables.â€•

Her response hits the nail on the head. When we are in meetings, we are not doing productive work. Unless meetings have clear agendas, and specific action items to address, we must avoid them.

Here are three signs you should terminate a meeting:

#1: Key decision-makers are missing.

Meetings are designed to identify problems, discuss alternatives, and make decisions. If you are having meetings mostly to share information, you are wasting time. There are more productive approaches to sharing information, and bringing everyone to one location is not one of them.

If the key decision-maker is unable to attend the meeting, you need to cancel it. You should follow-up with the important stakeholder, and determine a date and time when she can attend. Once you have confirmation, the new meeting is scheduled.

#2: There is too much animosity, resentment, or apathy.

Meetings are designed to generate positive discussion. We can have conflict, but it should be productive, such as raising awareness of important issues. When you notice that meeting-goers are angry, upset, resentful, or apathetic, you must find a creative way to end the meeting.

The point here is that a healthy discussion is impossible when the attendees are engaging in personal attacks, or disinterested in the purpose of the meeting. Unless the discussion is professional, the meeting must end. After the meeting, you should work with the key stakeholders to determine the root cause of the problem. It might be necessary to remove some individuals from the discussion. Before doing that, though, make sure you have support from your leadership team.

#3: The topic is no longer relevant.

If during the meeting you receive information from a reliable source that the main purpose of the meeting is no longer important to the organization, you should look to terminate the discussion. For example, youâ€™re informed that the product your team is tasked to build will now be purchased from a reputable vendor. Since your leadership team has decided to buy vs. build, your meeting efforts are useless. You should politely end the meeting, and seek clarification from your leadership point-of-contact.

Some meetings do provide value, and must be held. However, the majority can be avoided. In some cases, the meeting should end early because a key stakeholder cannot attend, personality issues prevent a productive discussion, or the main purpose of the meeting is no longer valid. Itâ€™s your job as the meeting coordinator to make the call and either reschedule or cancel the meeting based on the new information. You can seek guidance, but the final decision is yours to make.

Article Source:
http://www.articleside.com/management-articles/3-signs-you-should-terminate-a-meeting.htm - Article Side

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Article Keywords:
career development, leadership development, success strategies, leadership development, customer service, book of knowledge, online learner,

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