

Special Management Series

The people who love meetings are the managers who run them

**This is a series of Training for your
Management TEAM**

Presented by J.W. Owens



**A Management
Perspective 303 Series**

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- Four years ago, a cheeky survey of workplace attitudes asked more than 2,000 Americans whether they'd prefer to attend an office status meeting or run an dreaded errand like going to the Department of Motor Vehicles to renew a driver's license, watching paint dry, or getting a root canal.
- **The results of that survey**—conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of software maker Clarizen—spoke volumes: **46%** of employed Americans chose one of the dreary tasks over the meeting, with the DMV trip and paint-monitoring named as the preferred choice for **18% and 17%** of respondents, respectively.

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- **“A leader’s experience of the meeting appears to be fundamentally different from the experiences of other meeting attendees, with leaders thinking things were, well, quite glorious,”** Rogelberg observes.
- In one survey of more than 1,300 Verizon employees, **79%** of “respondents rated the meetings they themselves initiated as being extremely or very productive,” he writes, though they said the same of only **56%** of meetings led by someone else.
- Rogelberg takes these results as a sign of self-inflation bias, a phenomenon he has seen in his own scholarly work, and in a paper he co-authored with a professor at Peking University. That research, which he once described in Harvard Business Review, found a correlation between people who talk most in meetings and more favorable impressions of the meeting experience. **“Well, guess who typically talks the most in meetings?”** Rogelberg asks.

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What's behind your meeting routine?

- If you're a manager, dear reader, the odds that your team eagerly anticipates your meetings are low. But don't blame yourself entirely.
- Our corporate culture is doing meetings wrong. As productivity and motivation author Daniel Pink has pointed out, for instance, companies ignore what science has taught us about the times of day when people are more likely to be creative or analytical, and instead schedule meetings based only on when key people are available. It's “**managerial malpractice,**” says Pink.

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What's behind your meeting routine?

- The same charge could apply to organizations that don't teach managers how to run meetings, which is most of them: Rogelberg **has found that only a fraction of leaders have been coached in meeting facilitation.**
- Given that an estimated 55 million meetings are held daily in the US, as his book suggests, there must be a hell of a lot of bad meetings going on where employees would rather be having a root canal.
- Many of those unpleasant meetings are probably the result of, among other issues, plain laziness. Within companies, unquestioned norms about how meetings are held can create rituals that live on for years, according to Rogelberg. **Even the one-hour meeting standard exists only because that was the habit decades ago, he explains, so it became the literal default in our calendar software, and the tradition continued.**

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The telltale signs you're not doing it right

- Software like Slack and other group messaging apps have cut back on the need for certain types of information-gathering meetings, or even brainstorming hours, but we haven't been able to shake the in-person congregation entirely.
- We still need the conference table as a stand-in for the ancient ancestral hearth, and the opportunity to bond with each other. Rogelberg observes that as companies have become more democratic and structurally flat, meetings have come to be seen as more essential, not less.
- Handily, **the professor—who, it should be noted, also sells meeting-leading seminars as a consultant— offers some concrete, observable signs that you can use to gauge whether your meetings are going well.**

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The telltale signs you're not doing it right

- During a meeting, for instance, if you're doing all or most of the talking (something you can measure with a recorder), or if people are playing on their phones and holding side conversations (look around), you may have failed to create equal space for employees to share their thoughts and ideas.
- **Another strong possibility:** you may have invited too many people to the party, which allows the less-necessary folks to let their attention roam. Importantly, if your meetings are devoid of conflicting views, he adds, you may not have created psychological safety.

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The telltale signs you're not doing it right

- **His advice:** Your ego may not like it, but start holding an honest meeting quality assessment every three months, and never stop seeking feedback.
- **Building self-awareness about your own meeting style and its deficiencies will make life better for everyone.**

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Good Selling !



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