



Meetings as Time-Wasters by Pat Letendre

Time management is a struggle for most laboratory managers. **Meetings** are commonly seen as real time wasters. Many managers would agree that, in today's lab, meetings often leave little time in the day for anything else. Participants may complain that meetings are unproductive, disorganized, and useless.

To enhance meeting effectiveness, consider these time-related guidelines:

1. Take 10 minutes each morning and review your day's schedule. Prioritize what is most important to accomplish that day. Eliminate meetings that have no purposes that are crucial to your current goals.
2. Before planning a meeting, consider its cost in terms of staff time. For example, a one-hour meeting with 10 technologists earning \$30/hour will cost \$300, which does not include lost productivity and potential overtime to make it up.
3. Use meetings to discuss and to problem solve, not to distribute straight-forward information. Do not waste people's time by telling them something that could have been easily communicated by a memo or e-mail. Distribute the information beforehand and use the meeting to obtain feedback.
4. Prepare an agenda and circulate it before the meeting so that people can add to it. Indicate whether an item requires discussion, a decision, or is simply an announcement.
5. Place important items first on the agenda. This allows staff to discuss them while fresh and ensures that priorities are handled first.
6. Start meetings on time. Do not penalize those who show up on time by waiting for those who do not. Respect people's time by ending meetings on time.
7. Stick to the agenda except in exceptional circumstances. Place time limits on each item. Do not get sidetracked by staff going off on a tangent. If the topic is important, add it to the next meeting's agenda.
8. Write meaningful, concise minutes. Staff who did not attend should be as informed as those who did.
9. Have a staff member write action steps during each meeting. Action steps summarize what was decided, what each person has agreed to do, with specific deadlines. At the next meeting, the first order of business should be the status of the action steps.

10. Assess if your presence is always required. For some external meetings, could attending be just as effectively done by a designate?

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