



# The Effective Organization

July 2008

## Where Did The Time Go?

There is nothing quite like that warm feeling you get at the end of the day when you look back and wonder where the time went. There is nothing quite like realizing that an entire day has gone by and nothing got done. Unfortunately, this happens far too often, especially when the day holds meetings.

Meetings have a bad reputation for consuming a great deal of time while producing little of substance. That reputation is well deserved. Despite this, meetings remain extremely popular in many companies. Unfortunately, in addition to potentially wasting a great deal of time, meetings often tend to leave people drained and unable to focus. As a result, they use up even more time getting back on track after the meeting.

Meetings are popular in part because they can create an illusion of progress. Although that illusion tends to evaporate in the cold, hard light of the end of the day, when people are uncertain about how to proceed or feeling overwhelmed, meetings can provide a certain level of comfort and security. They make the person calling the meeting feel productive. This is especially common with inexperienced

managers or CEOs, who feel a need to be constantly observing every step the team or company takes. The price for this comfort is time taken away from actual work, which leads to discomfort, and hence a desire to hold more meetings.

In businesses that have too many meetings, the greatest dangers are that too much work time will be wasted and critical information will be lost in the noise: brought up in a meeting, and quickly forgotten or simply not noticed.

On the flip side, some companies refuse to hold any meetings. Oddly enough, this approach doesn't work either.

There are times when it can be very valuable to spend some focused time working on a problem with other people, exchanging ideas, or brainstorming. Not all information is easily conveyed over email. In businesses that have no meetings, the greatest danger is that time will be wasted trying to figure out what to do and critical information will never be communicated.

In fact, the two extreme positions of too many meetings or too few

## Upcoming Events

*Gifted Kids and Sports*, online class sponsored by the Davidson Institute. August 25-29.

For more information, please visit [www.7stepsahead.com](http://www.7stepsahead.com).

## Publications

*Great Follies in American Business -- The "Great-Uncle" Technique* in [ByThePeople.org](http://ByThePeople.org).

*Building a Talent Team, Not A Horde of Heroes* in *Mass High Tech*.

meetings produce remarkably similar results, none of them good.

The goal is to have exactly as many meetings as are necessary, control their length, and make them work. Fortunately, there are a number of simple techniques to make this happen.

1. Only hold meetings that are actually important. Ask yourself what purpose the meeting is serving, and if there is a more efficient way to accomplish the same thing. For example, status meetings make managers feel good, but

achieve little else. Instead, encourage the relevant people to send out brief email announcements whenever they complete a task. Everyone will have the information in their mailbox instead of having to remember it.

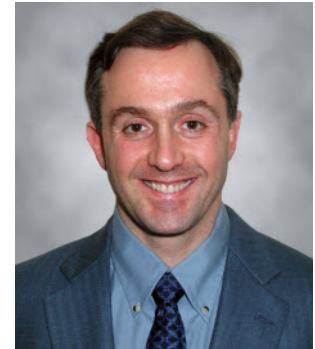
2. Start on time: Most people don't do anything right before a meeting because they know that they'll be interrupted. If the meeting starts late, employees will lose time waiting. Habitually starting meetings late sends the message that you don't care about your employees' time, thus decreasing motivation and increasing irritation.
3. Have an agenda: Know ahead of time what you want to accomplish in the meeting. Don't let the meeting wander off in search of a topic.

4. Limit the meeting duration in advance: This helps keep you honest and keep people focused. It also lets people plan their day better, allowing for more efficient use of time.
5. Moderate the discussion: If you're running a design meeting or brainstorming session, don't allow one or two very vocal people to dominate the discussion. Quiet people can have good ideas too.
6. After the meeting, review it and see if you accomplished the goals you defined in step 3. If not, understand why not: inappropriate or incorrect goals, poor process, unnecessary meeting, etc. Adjust accordingly for future meetings.

A meeting is a tool, nothing more. Like all tools, it must be used properly in order to reap the benefits.

Good luck!

## *About 7 Steps Ahead*



Stephen R. Balzac is the president of 7 Steps Ahead, a consulting firm specializing in increasing individual, team, and organizational performance.

Steve has over twenty years of experience in the high tech industry and is the former Director of Operations for Silicon Genetics, in Redwood City, CA.

He serves on the boards of the New England Society of Applied Psychology (NESAP) and the Society of Professional Consultants (SPC). Steve is a member of the Operations Committee of the American Judo & Jujitsu Federation. No stranger to the challenges of achieving peak performance under competitive and stressful conditions, he holds a fourth degree black belt in jujitsu and is a former nationally ranked competitive fencer. Steve is an adjunct professor of Industrial/Organizational Psychology at Wentworth Institute of Technology and has guest lectured at MIT and WPI.

Building effective development organizations, improving team morale, focus, and enthusiasm, developing effective communications between team members, reducing employee turnover, helping businesses identify and attain strategic targets, and applying sport psychology techniques to business have been some of his most successful projects.

**If you're thinking continuous improvement, you're thinking...**

