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**Runaway Meetings Are The Top Time Waster At Work**

**By Barbara Bartlein**

A new nationwide survey finds that "runaway" meetings are the biggest time waster in the workplace. More than 27 percent of workers polled said meetings are the largest culprit for inefficiency and lack of productivity.

The survey was developed by Office Team, a staffing service specializing in skilled administrative professionals. With responses from 613 men and women, all 18 years or older, the findings are part of the "Office Team Career Challenge," a project to help administrative professionals advance their careers.

With today's lean staffing levels, there is increasing pressure for employees to manage their time effectively. Yet, many employers actually sabotage time management with runaway meetings and interruptions. Industry Week calls meetings "the Great White Collar Crime" estimating they waste 37 billion dollars a year.

Some 'red flags' that can indicate a mismanaged meeting:

- No one in charge. If the leadership of the meeting isn't clear, there is a tendency for attendees to waste time, pontificate their points and not draw any conclusions.
- Not starting on time. This practice 'trains' employees to come late and expect additional time for socializing.
- Lack of objectives or agenda. With no clear purpose or agenda to follow, it is easy for the meeting to get off track. Participants may not be clear as to what needs to be discussed or for how long.
- Lengthy guest list. As a general rule, the more people at a meeting, the less work accomplished. When the list of attendees is extensive, it is often because there is a focus on not excluding anyone, not because each member's participation is necessary.
- Just part of the routine. Regularly scheduled meetings can lose value as circumstances and staff change. All routine meetings should be periodically evaluated to determine whether they should be

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held at all.

To learn how to make meetings more productive, I contacted Chris Clarke–Epstein, CSP, who wrote the book, *I Can't Take Your Call Right Now, I'm In a Meeting*. The former president of the National Speaker's Association, she works with clients to help employees learn faster and work better. She offers concrete ideas to make your meetings more effective.

- Idea #1: Not every meeting should take place. The right times to schedule a meeting are when conflicts need to be resolved, groups of people need to start working together or information needs to be shared at the same time. Meetings are a group activity so they can be effective when a group needs to reach consensus or rally around an idea or plan.

- Idea#2: The person who calls the meeting has more to do than reserve the room. They need to also consider other logistical issues, including; time, equipment needed, and food/beverage. They need to take ownership of the content including preparation of an agenda and distribution of review materials. It is important to have a system to follow up on assignments and monitor the results of the meeting.

- Idea #3: Meetings are no better than the people attending them. According to the Warton Center for Applied Research, the primary cause of unproductive meetings is not having the right people in attendance. The most effective participants at any meeting are: people who have the information you need, people who can make decisions, and people who will implement the decisions.

- Idea #4: What gets recorded at a meeting has a chance of getting done. All meetings need some form of collective, agreed–upon memory. Without documentation, consensus can quickly evaporate. Meeting notes need to summarize the decisions made, itemize the actions agreed upon, fix accountability and document the deadlines for all actions.

- Idea #5: Meetings that end without assignments are doomed to be repeated. Groups are often very good at decision making and unbelievably poor at implementation. There needs to be an identified person to implement each decision within a specific timeframe. Watch to make certain that everyone is getting some of the responsibilities.

- Idea #6: Teams that evaluate their meetings have better meetings. Take two or three minutes at the end of each meeting to evaluate the process. Use index cards and answer the following questions: Were the meeting's objectives met? Was the meeting's format effective? Was the meeting of value?

The true value of any meeting is what actually happens after the meeting takes place. Make sure that individuals are held accountable for meeting results. And remember, if you don't measure it, it won't happen.

For more ideas on effective meetings and building productive teams, please visit:

[www.chrisclarke–epstein.com](http://www.chrisclarke–epstein.com)

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Barbara Bartlein, CSP, is the People Pro. She offers keynotes, training and products that help you build your business and balance your life. She can be reached at 888-747-9953, by e-mail at

[barb@ThePeoplePro.com](mailto:barb@ThePeoplePro.com)

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## **Where Can I Get Clients From?**

**By Sue and Chuck DeFiore**

The following tips have come from a wide variety of sources; some from other successful businesses we know, some from our Home-Based and Small Business Support Group meetings and some we've developed by trial and error.

Some of the ways to get clients are: contact previous employers; mailing lists; cold call your target market; attend group meetings and seminars for your target market (conventions for doctors, lawyers; computer seminars); attend local Chamber of Commerce meetings; join groups related to your target market; if your target market uses a specific system, for example accountants use the SafeGuard system, contact them and tell them that you are available to teach them how to use the system or you can do it for them. Knock on doors and call others in your line of business for overload work, or clients they have trouble working with. Send surveys to your clients. This will also help you to obtain testimonials. Do a general survey of your target market. This will give you better leads. For example, for my classes, I have a survey I use that contains, what type of equipment is being used, what type of programs they are using, and whether or not they do desk top publishing in-house. This survey gives me the name, address, and phone number of the person to send my class listings to, in addition, to determining whether or not they are a desk top publishing prospect.

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