



# Beating the meeting

It's never too late to change the way you work in order to maximise your potential. In the first article in a series on winning work habits, David Parmenter shares some observations

**T**here are a number of changes you can implement to make yourself and your team more effective. Some might seem counter-intuitive, but nonetheless the following are worth considering:

- \* Ban morning meetings for the finance team and avoid having meetings during your most productive time. I fail to see why CFOs feel the need to have meetings with their direct reports at 9am on a Monday; these are often followed by more meetings as the debriefing is passed down the chain. Why not have this meeting at 4:30pm on a Friday? It would certainly be a quick one.
- \* Work in one-and-a-half to two-hour blocks. Book blocks of time in your diary so that you can work in multiple blocks of time on service delivery activities such as future-orientated tasks, client-focused activities, and projects to improve service levels and workload. Meetings to be held later in the day would be slotted into block time periods as well. This will create a more relaxed and successful goal-scoring day for you.
- \* Have 'action meetings'. Many meetings are totally flawed, held because they have become a ritual. Their fundamental purpose has long been forgotten. The problem has been that the training has not looked at all the core reasons for failure. The action meetings methodology ([actionmeetings.com](http://actionmeetings.com)) addresses the real reasons behind dysfunctional meetings and suggests ways to bring about significant improvement.
- \* Get people properly into and out of the meeting. This is done through the introduction of a 'first word' and 'last word', where attendees briefly say what state they are in. The first words could be 'I am very time challenged and this meeting is last thing I need,' to a last word, 'This meeting once again promised little and delivered nothing' or 'I look forward to receiving Pat's report and working with the project team'. The key is that attendees can say anything about how they feel at that point; their comment should remain unchallenged.
- \* Have an agenda constructed around outcomes. This involves the use of precise wording about meeting outcomes, which

## Next steps

1. Analyse all the meetings attended by finance team members in the last two weeks and cost out the time
2. Visit [actionmeetings.com](http://actionmeetings.com) to discover more about this methodology
3. Email me ([parmenter@waymark.co.nz](mailto:parmenter@waymark.co.nz)) for more instructions on how to hold action meetings

- should provide focus and the ability to easily check whether an item has in fact been completed. One major benefit of establishing meeting outcomes worded in this way is that requested attendees should not attend if they do not think they can add value or assist in achieving the outcomes.
- \* Allow meetings to be participant-owned, not chairman-owned. All attendees should be trained in the new methodology so meetings are owned and policed by all participants and are less reliant on the capability of the chairman.
  - \* Once an outcome is closed, it remains closed. During the meeting, remind anyone who is opening a closed item that it has in fact been closed.
  - \* Park non-related issues. Any issues raised that are not related to the outcome under discussion should be tabled for another, future discussion.
  - \* Write action steps. These should be crafted carefully and shared on a platform that all can access so that everyone can follow the progress. ■

David Parmenter is a writer and presenter on measuring, monitoring and managing performance

For more information:

[davidparmenter.com](http://davidparmenter.com)

