



How to run an impactful meeting

By Andy Bounds

Last week, I looked at three of the four things that initiate meetings – other people, habit and obligation. This week, let's look at the fourth – the meetings *you* initiate.

Let's start with two indisputable facts about meetings:

1. Most aren't very good
2. Most are prepared using a similar process.

Conclusion: the process doesn't work very well.

So don't do it.

And what is this process? "I want to discuss topic X. So let's get all the relevant stakeholders in a room, so we can hit everyone at once. Let's also cover all the relevant topics on the agenda, so we can hit *everything* at once. Let's bang in an hour."

Familiar, yes? As is the usual result: meandering, boring and too few resulting actions.

A better approach is to prepare using PALM:

- **Purpose** – identify *exactly* what you want to be able to do after the meeting (in other words, focus first on what the meeting is supposed to cause, not cover)
- **Agenda** – list the key decisions that need to be made, in order to achieve the purpose
- **Limit time** – don't say meetings will last an hour, or they will. Instead, say they will last "A maximum of 45 minutes". Most meetings are

too long anyway, so shortening them is only going to do good. And saying "A maximum of" means that people expect it to finish earlier. So it often does.

- **Minimum attendees** – this sounds weird; but you want to strip out as many people as possible. When two people meet, there is just one agreement: person A agreeing with B. However, when four meet, it shoots up to 6 agreements (AB, AC, AD, BC, BD, CD). When it gets to 8-12 people, the number of agreements rockets up even further

If you prefer this PALM approach, use it everywhere. So, not just during a meeting, but also:

- In your diary invites – start with a purpose, then agenda, then say it will last "A maximum of..."
- All of your communications before the meeting
- Your introduction at the start of the meeting – "Thanks for your time today. The reason for this meeting is so that, after it, we're able to do X and Y. We'll finish as soon as we can"
- The printed agenda – put the purpose at the top etc.
- Your follow-up email confirming actions

Half the meetings in your organisation are below average. Are yours above or below?

What simple changes could you make, so that everyone looks forward to coming to your meetings, rather than arriving late. Or not at all.

Action point

Identify the first meeting you can apply PALM to. Then give it a go.

Nobody will mind your next meeting taking 45 minutes instead of 60...

Nor the fact there are clear actions arising...

Nor the fact that the diary invite made it look interesting!

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About the Author

Andy Bounds is an expert at helping companies communicate and sell better. Author of two best-selling books and winner of the title Britain's Sales Trainer of the Year, Andy has shared his expertise with some of the world's largest companies, helping every one of them have more success. Marketing legend Drayton Bird said Andy had taught him '... more about effective communicating than a lady who'd taught two American Presidents'.

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