

How to run results-based conversations and meetings

By Doug McVadon

Like many executives, Marguerite has the consistent problem that her presence is required at more meetings than are strategic for her to attend. She says it this way, "It always ends up being about MY time, and I want people to carry on without me." How can it be that her people's chief complaint is that they can't get enough of her time or focus when she has an open-door policy and people are free to interrupt her at any time?

Friday morning, after arriving (typically) 25 minutes late, she said, "I need help! I am so fulfilled by the conversations I have with Joe, but every time we meet, it takes two and a half hours!"

We told Marguerite we could help, starting right now, and gave her the following "rules" for meetings and conversations:

1. No meetings for discussion. This practice will eradicate the habit of asking "What do we need to discuss?" In place of focusing on "topics" and "issues," you are creating a culture in which meetings and conversations are scheduled to accomplish specific outcomes.
2. Establish the outcome at the outset by asking, "What do we need to produce in this conversation?" For example,
 - We create our strategy for calling 100 leads and have our next actions.
 - We finalize our location and target market for the San Antonio branch.
3. Start on time. Concerned about people doing what they say they will do, when they say they will do it? Develop some muscle around your expectations. You people need to build travel and preparation time into their schedules so you can start promptly and have everyone fully focused from the get-go.
4. Set an END time for each meeting and/or conversation.
5. End the meeting at that time, REGARDLESS of whether the outcome has been produced. This forces everyone to acknowledge when their conversation has NOT produced a result. Acknowledging the failure, and not excusing it, will create pressure to be more intentional at the start of meetings, and to stay on task.

So simple and powerful are these new practices, that Marguerite immediately requested that we "train the whole company in this." And she means it: she asked me to check my calendar and schedule myself to come back to Atlanta - regardless of her "availability" - at my earliest opportunity, to attend whatever meetings are taking place, and to be a "fly on the wall," listening for where to train people in this, and to do so on the spot.