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Meetings are an unavoidable yet fundamental part of life for businesses of all types, including accounting firms. In fact, they probably take up about a quarter of your workday, suggests a recent Accountemps survey.

Some meetings are useful, allowing employees to communicate, collaborate and solve business problems. But professionals know all too well that not all of them are productive. The finance leaders surveyed said 21 percent of time spent at meetings is wasted. Of the workers responding to the study, even more thought of them as a waste of time — 25 percent.

Why ineffective meetings are a problem

There are two main problems with poorly run meetings. One is what the survey pointed to: a waste of time. And time is money. Considering that, on average, workers spend 21 percent of their time in meetings and 25 percent of that is wasted, you're looking at about two nonproductive hours per week. That's more than 100 hours a year per person.

When you multiply that by the number of employees in your firm and their salaries, the dollars quickly add up. Imagine the possibilities if staff could dedicate even a fraction of that time to revenue-generating activities.

The second problem could be even worse: Workers don't respect executives who run ineffective meetings. They think, "If my supervisor can't take charge in this area, they're likely weak in other aspects of firm management as well." When leaders run a tight ship but do so with empathy and generosity, however, they improve their

agenda or invitation. Every participant needs to understand why they've been asked to attend.

- **DO make sure the meeting is necessary.** Ask yourself two questions before issuing a meeting invitation: 1) Can the information be covered just as well in an email? 2) Can you wait to discuss the issue during another meeting with the same attendees? If the answer to either question is "yes," don't send the invite.

- **DO trim the attendees list.** Less is more when it comes to meetings. Unless you're planning an all-department or all-firm gathering, limit the participants to those who will benefit from and add value to the discussion.

- **DON'T tolerate latecomers.** They work at every organization — people who perpetually show up or dial in late to meetings. Keep the focus, though, on those who have joined on time and begin the discussion when planned. This shows you respect your team's time, don't play favorites and start your meetings on schedule.

- **DON'T get derailed.** While it's fine to start with chitchat, discourage people from going off-topic once the meeting is underway. If a new topic is important, add it to the end of the agenda and discuss it if there's time. If not, call a follow-up meeting.

- **DON'T let it run long.** Drawn-out meetings are, at best, less than effective and, at worst, grueling for participants. A good rule of thumb is not to go beyond an hour. If you have many issues to discuss, consider breaking up a session into several shorter ones.

- **DON'T rely on visuals.** Productive meetings are about dialogue. People want a chance to engage, ask questions and hear other perspectives.
  When used well, a short presentation can facilitate conversation and spur ideation. A definite no-no is filling the conversation with text-heavy slides that you read from. Remember, it's a meeting, not a lecture.

- **DO reassess regular, longstanding meetings.** There should be a compelling

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