

# Are Your Meetings Getting an A+? Take the Test!

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**Pam Vaccaro, MA, CSP**

Riddle: Where do we take minutes and lose hours? Meetings. The very mention of the word can produce Chronic Stress Syndrome. Even if you are using the trendier conference call, the results can be the same—ineffective use of participants' time.

At a time when you must already trim patient care time, you cannot afford to spend your time at unproductive meetings. What can be done? If you are the meeting planner, it is easier to implement these suggestions. If you are not, suggest to the chairperson that your group look at the meeting. Your staff, board, professional association meetings will energize you when meetings are working for you.

Imagine that your meeting is "ill" and goes to the doctor. The patient feels rejection because no one really wants to associate. Depression deepens from feeling unproductive and not worthwhile. There is the familiar complaint of hopelessness coming from a lot of talk about future possibilities and then no follow-through. The meeting says it is always the same with no end in sight.

How to heal your meeting and enjoy a healthy satisfying use of time with your colleagues .

## Check list!

- Do your healthcare walk away from 95% of your meetings feeling it was really a good use of time?
- Is there time before the meeting to submit agenda items?
- Did you set part of the agenda for the current meeting at the last meeting? (Hopefully you see the agenda before the next meeting)
- Does your agenda list the four or five objectives of the meeting?
- Does your agenda put time limits on each line item?
- Does your agenda state what is to happen on each line item?  
(Example: decision/action, FYI, call for ideas, clarification?)
- Does the person taking the minutes do *action minutes* stating **who** will do **what** by **when** and **why** (for what objective)?
- Does everyone participate?
- Is there some fun built in the meeting?
- Is there some food?
- Do you start exactly on time all the time?
- Do you end exactly on time all the time?
- Have you set rules for meeting behavior to guarantee a respectful, effective, efficient, and productive meeting?
- Once in awhile do you meet somewhere different?
- Do you go away knowing who is accountable for what and feel sure the accountability issue will be addressed?
- Do you have a celebration at the end of each accomplishment of the team? (example: finished Joint Commission work)
- Once in awhile do you decide it is really not necessary to meet?

- ❑ Does the meeting chair always know who will not be at the meeting?
- ❑ If you have ever chaired a meeting, do you refuse to spend a lot of time going over the meeting events with those who were not there? Does the chairperson do this?
- ❑ Are you meetings safe places? Do you focus on issues, not personality?

Score: 20            The problem is all in the meeting's mind.

Score: 10-19        Start working out by trimming some of the excess weight. Focus on the problem areas. Implement change now.

Score: 5-9           Consider hospitalization. Conditions will only worsen unless a number of changes are made in the structure of the meeting. Bring in your healthcare team. Work together on change.

Score: 1-4           Administer CPR immediately:  
Consider and implement the suggestions for a healthy meeting. Practice them consistently. Reap the benefits in productive use of time, better patient care, and your colleagues' moral.

A healthy meeting says to you and your busy colleagues, "I value your time." Accept nothing less.

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