

Business as Usual

Ever been bogged by meetings. Here are handy tips on how to ‘sleep with your eyes open’ and yet ‘stay in control’ at meetings.

o really succeed in a business or organization, it is sometimes helpful to know what your job is, and duties. Ask among your coworkers. “Hi,’ you should say. I’m a new employee. What is my job?’ If they answer long-range planner’ or ‘lieutenant governor,’ it means you are pretty free to lounge around and do crossword puzzles until retirement. Most jobs, however, will require some work.

There are two major kinds of work in modern organizations:

1. Taking phone messages for people who are in meetings, and,

2. Going to meetings.

Your ultimate career strategy will be to get a job involving Number 2 going to meetings as soon as possible, because that’s where the real prestige is. It is all very well and good to be able to take phone messages, but you are never going to get a position of power- a position where you can cost thousands of people their jobs with a single bonehead decision unless you learn how to attend

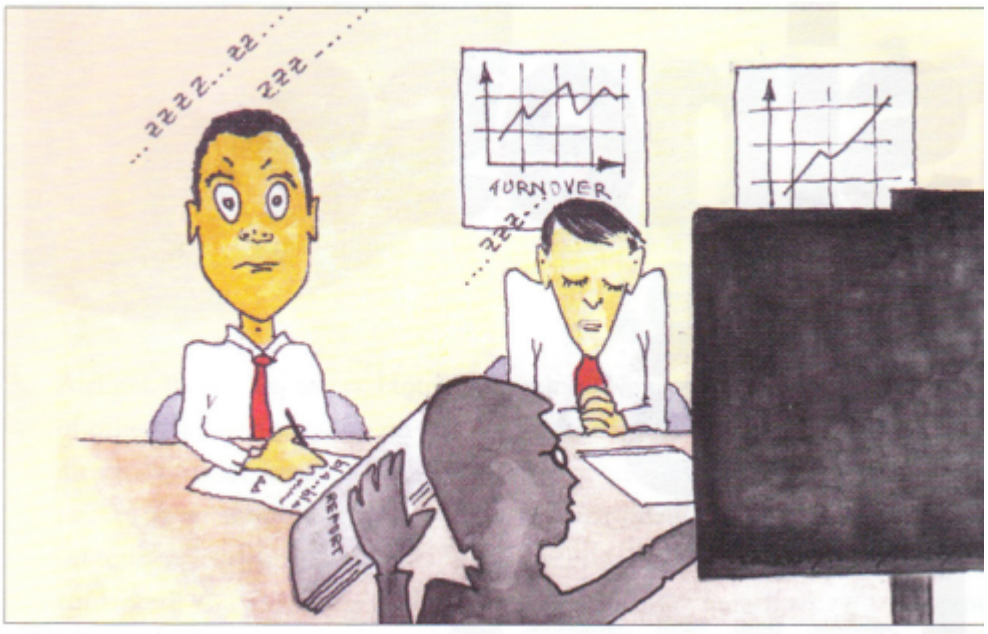
The first meeting ever was held way back in the Mezzanine Era. In those days, Man's job was to slay his prey and bring it home for Woman, who had to figure out how to cook it. The problem was, Man was slow and basically naked, whereas the prey had warm fur and could run like an antelope. (In fact it was an antelope, only nobody knew this).

At last someone said, 'maybe if we just sat down and did some brainstorming, we could come up with a better way to hunt our prey!" The meeting went extremely well, plus it was much warmer sitting in a circle around a fire, so they agreed to meet again the next day, and the next.

But the women pointed out that, preywise, the men had not produced anything, and that the human race was pretty much starving. The men agreed that it was a serious matter and said they would put it right on top of their 'agenda' at the next meeting. At this point, the women, who were primitive but not stupid, started eating plants, and thus modern agriculture was born. It never would have happened without meetings.

The modern business meeting. however, might better be compared to a funeral, in the sense that you have a gathering of people who are wearing uncomfortable clothing and would rather be somewhere else. The major difference is that most funerals have a definite purpose. Also, unlike funerals nothing is really ever buried in a meeting.

An idea may look dead, but it will always reappear at another meeting, later on. If you have ever seen the movie, 'Night of the Living Dead,' you'll have a rough idea of how modern meetings operate, with projects and proposals that everyone thought were killed, rising up constantly from their graves to stagger back into meetings and eat the brains of the living. There are two major kinds of meetings:



1. Meetings that are held for basically the same reason that say Boxing Day is observed namely, tradition.

For example, a lot of managerial people like to meet on Monday, because it's Monday. You'll get used to it. You'd better, because this kind account for 83% of all meetings. This type of meeting operates the way 'Show and Tell' does in a nursery school, with everyone getting to say some thing, the difference being that in nursery school, the kids actually have something to say.

When it's your turn, you should say that you're still working on whatever it is you're supposed to be working on. This may seem pretty dumb, since obviously you'd be working on whatever you're supposed to be working on, and even if you weren't, you'd claim you were, but that's the traditional thing for everyone to say. It would be a lot better if the person running the meeting would just say, 'everyone who is still working on what he or she is supposed to be working on, raise your hand.' You'd be out of there in five minutes, even allowing for jokes and a cup of milk tea with forty-eight sugars, the way most teaboys make it in Sri Lanka.

2. Meetings where there is some alleged purpose.

These are trickier, because what you do depends on what the purpose is. Sometimes the purpose is harmless, like someone wants to show slides of pie charts and give everyone a big, fat report. All you have to do in this kind of meeting is sit

there and have elaborate fantasies about being on the beach at Unawatuna, then take the report back to your office and throw it away, unless, of course, you're a vice president, in which case you write the name of a subordinate in the upper right hand corner, followed by a question mark, like this: '

Ravi?" Then you send it to Ravi and forget all about it (although it will plague Ravi for the rest of his career).

But sometimes you go to meetings where the purpose is to get your 'input' on something. This is very serious because what it means is, they want to make sure that in case whatever it is turns out to be stupid or fatal, you'll get some of the blame, so you have to escape from the meeting before they get around to asking you anything. One way is to set fire to your tie. Or take hostages.

Another way is to have an accomplice interrupt the meeting and announce that you have a phone call from someone very important, such as the president of the company or the Pope. It should be one or the other.

You should know how to take notes at a meeting. Use a yellow legal pad.

At the top, write the date and underline it twice. Now wait until an important person, such as your boss, starts talking; when he does, look at him with an expression of enraptured interest, as though he is revealing the secrets of life itself. Then draw interlocking rectangles. Or if you prefer, practice your sig nature. If it is an especially lengthy meeting, you can try something like a full scale portrait or concentrate on discretely picking your nose. If somebody falls asleep in a meeting, have everyone else leave the room. Then collect a group of total strangers, right off the street, and have them sit around the sleeping person until he wakes up. Then have one of them say to him, "Ravi, your plan is very, very risky. However, you've given us no choice but to try it. I only hope, for your sake, that you know what you're getting yourself into.' Then they should file out quietly out of the room. Don't ever give Ravi an even break. With luck you can soon declare him clinically insane.



Afdhel Aziz has learnt how to sleep with his eyes open. This is how he copes with most meetings.