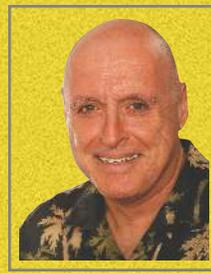


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1097 Why More People Don't Participate in Meetings — Part 1

One problem a lot of managers have is getting optimal participation in meetings. Too few people take part or maybe it's the same people every time. If you think that describes what's happening at your place, let's dig in and figure out possible reasons. I'm Jerry Roberts and that's coming next, on the The Extra Point.

I've been a part of numerous organizations and worked for a slew of managers, each with a different way of dealing with meetings.

Some wanted everybody there, others kept participation to only those who really needed to be present. Some kept complete control over every meeting, while others shared that. Some had strict agendas, and some had no agenda at all. I've seen all kinds of styles and approaches, successes and failures, and meetings people loved to attend, as well as those they did everything they could to avoid.

I've even written a four-hour training course on how to get the most out of meetings. So, when somebody asked me why they were having trouble getting attendees to take part, I had some ideas based on my experience.

Reason 1: Fear. It's the same reason kids don't want to raise their hand to answer questions in school. They dread the idea of being wrong, and worse, that they'll be ridiculed for what they say.

Just like kids in class, coworkers can also be cruel and make you feel dumb. I've seen it in too many of the meetings I've attended, and you probably have, too.

It only has to happen once for someone to decide they're just going to keep their mouth shut unless forced to answer.

If you've got someone on your team who gets their kicks by trolling the comments of others, get with that person and shut it down. There's

no need to make a scene. You can just set a rule to hold all comments until the end, or that you're only seeking comments that expand on what others contribute. That should handle it.

Reason 2: The situation is unclear. The people who attend should have a solid understanding of the subject matter. Without that, how can you expect them to jump into the discussion?

Ahead of the meeting, be sure that attendees have a clear picture of the issue, especially how it relates to their job or department.

You can email the agenda, along with all background details or supporting documents that will aid their knowledge. You can also add a note, such as, "Please be prepared to talk about this matter as it relates to your operation. If you're unsure, see me."

This alerts them that they'll be expected to contribute, and gives them an opportunity to ask questions ahead of the meeting.

I've got more to share on this topic and we'll do that tomorrow, but I want to add one more thing for today. It's another common issue we see in meetings, and it relates to the fear I mentioned. This will require some awareness on your part.

If you've got a participant who gets incredibly nervous at the thought of talking in a meeting, don't let them sweat it out and have their stomach tied up in knots as they wait to be called on.

When you introduce the topic you've asked them to be a part of, call on them first, or as early as possible. That will help them overcome their nervousness, and you may find they'll be okay to stay in the conversation.

(Con't.)

I'll have more tomorrow on how to encourage greater participation in your meetings.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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