

Making Notes in Meetings Makes You More Effective

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Most organizations conduct meetings. Yet some people find meetings to be one of their least enjoyable activities.

I can't promise this article will raise your level of enjoyment, but this counsel will make your time spent in meetings far more productive, for both you and your organization. And with a focus for your attention, you'll be more effective with the time you spend in meetings.

The idea for today's article came in a meeting! A client's leadership team was talking about the future direction of their organization. At the end of the meeting, they considered two questions: "What did we do well in this meeting?" and "What could we do better next time we meet?"

One individual kept referencing notes he had made during the meeting. After each new insight he shared, the others offered their perspectives.

As the energy died down, people turned their eyes and their expectations back to this individual to seek his additional thoughts. This happened three or four times. The experience caused me to ponder, "Is there a correlation between a person's habitual taking of notes and a rather significant influence on others?"

I then wondered why so many people sit through meetings and don't make notes. I invite you to ask this question of yourself.

Please consider experimenting with consciously taking notes in at least a couple of meetings, to see if this action can raise your level of contribution and influence. Keep in mind that there are at least three different types of notes you can make.

Content. These are the kinds of notes that you used to make in school. When the teacher talked, you wrote it down! These notes could be guidance provided by the person in authority, or they could be action steps you intend to make to support the effort.

Process. These are notes about how well the meeting is progressing. Maybe you'll have an opportunity at the end of the meeting to comment on what was done well and how things might go better in the future. Maybe you'll provide feedback to a specific individual. Most people leave concerns about the quality of the meeting to the leader, but you realize that as a caring team member, that's your job, too.

Springboarded ideas. As you listen to the conversation, ideas that you could pursue personally are popping in your brain. Your attention is on the dialogue, but you realize there are unique actions that you can take on your own. Sometimes the ideas support what's being discussed in the meeting. Sometimes the idea is totally independent of the dialogue, but could be developed into a desirable outcome anyway.

Making any of these three kinds of notes keeps you from being passive in meetings. Your active involvement causes you to be a more effective participant, allows you to contribute if there is an end-of-meeting critique, and provides personal "to do" items for your follow-up after the meeting.

As a leader, you might ask, "What can I do, Dennis, to help 'making notes' become a characteristic of my organization's culture?"

I suggest you genuinely expect reflective ideas from your team members when you ask "What did we do well?" and "What could we do better next time?" If you do not receive answers to those questions at the ends of your meetings, give them a copy of this article. Then wait silently and expectantly before you end your next meeting. Consistently require the thoughtful comments of your team members.

Want a better future for the organization you lead? Choose to build better leaders today. Contact Dennis Hooper at dhooper2@juno.com or (478)-988-0237. Examine his work at www.buildingfutureleaders.com.