



Enterprising Rural Families™

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TIP OF THE MONTH:

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOP MANAGERS

Research by the Best Practice Group studied 160 top farm managers in Western Canada and found four common practices:

1. **Become an innovator by spending money on research and development.** Not high-tech, expensive R&D, but everyday marketing studies, product testing, variety trials, or new production methods. E.g., top managers use a wide variety of marketing methods.
2. **Think strategically.** This group thinks strategically, long-term. They not only have an annual business plan, but look beyond that into the more distant future. Often they bring in outside experts for new ideas or perspectives.
3. **Manage your assets and look for diversification or value-added opportunities.** These managers had an intense desire to invest in projects to get them away from the ag commodity price cycle.
4. **Build a team.** Concentrate on what you do best and hire good people to run things you're not so good at.

(Source: *Management Musings*)

Oh no...Not another meeting!

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Let's declare war on meetings--time wasting, poorly run, unnecessary meetings that none of us feel should be required as part of our work lives.

Every family business, whether it has two employees or 200, has meetings as a regular part of getting things done. Although employees communicate with one another in many different ways, family business meetings...if they are conducted the right way...can be effective and efficient.

The good (and the bad) about meetings

We've all experienced more than our share of good and bad meetings. What makes some meetings dynamite, while others are simply the pits? Family businesses benefit in several ways when a meeting is well run:

- Meetings can be empowering
- Meetings can be an effective way to communicate
- Meetings can develop work skills
- Meetings can improve worker morale

Unfortunately, meetings are prone to fall into nonproductive pitfalls:

- Meetings may not have focus
- Businesses have too many meetings
- Participants may come unprepared
- Most meeting time is wasted¹



Conducting more effective meetings

First of all, all meetings need to have a goal or objective. It sounds trite, but if you can't think of a desired outcome of a meeting, then why meet at all? There are plenty of good reasons to meet: communicate information, solve problems, learn new skills, etc. But if you cannot identify a reason, then don't meet. Jon Petz, author of *Boring Meetings Suck: Get More Out of Your Meetings, Or Get OUT of More Meetings*, states that you have to ask yourself a two-part question. First, "What do you intend to accomplish before walking **out** the door?" Second, "Do the people you've invited know the answer to that question walking **in** the door?" If you can't answer this, your meeting could very well suck. Why? Because your response to this two-part question will get at what most meetings lack--focus and results. To achieve this focus and results, you need to write a **focus** and **outcome statement** for your meeting. And write this for every meeting.



At the top of your written agenda--and the first thing out of your mouth, should be stated (for example):

Focus: Review proposals for the new computer system from IT vendors

*Outcome: Walk out the door with the top two proposals selected and scheduled personal presentations from each.*²

There are other points that will improve the business meeting:

1. Prepare a written agenda.

Even if there is only one agenda item or the meeting is regularly scheduled, write it down and give copies to participants...in advance...so they can be prepared.

2. Start on time and end on time.

Everyone has suffered through meetings that went way beyond the scheduled time. Also, it is not fair to those who arrive on time to wait for those who don't. Pace the meeting to keep commitment to the promised ending time; others have planned work according to the scheduled time.

3. Maintain the focus.

Meetings can easily get off track and stay off track. Meeting leaders and participants must actively work to keep meetings focused on the agenda items. Whenever you see the meeting drifting off track, speak up to get it back in focus.



4. Be a good participant.

If you are a participant, you deserve a well-organized and well-run meeting. Don't tolerate a poor meeting. You are also expected to contribute to the success of the meeting.

5. Record appropriate minutes.

A meeting dilemma is deciding how much to record. Don't take exhaustive notes, i.e., "who said what". Focus instead on three categories of information--outcomes reached, action items on which people need to follow up, and open issues. Encouraging people to use these categories can sharpen the quality of their participation.

6. Have fewer (but better) meetings.

Call a meeting only when it is absolutely necessary. Before you call a meeting, ask yourself whether you can achieve the goal through some other format--personal communication, conference call, email exchange.³

A unique situation: The changing workforce

As discussed in previous issues (September 2006, November 2009, and December 2010) of the *Enterprising Rural Families* e-newsletter, the business workforce is dramatically changing. Robert Wendover, director for the Center for Generational Studies, consults about generational workplace behavior. He says that no topic has been a greater source of angst than the cultural change on business meetings influenced by the younger generations. Long-term workers have learned to be patient and deal with all the details of business meetings. Younger workers sit there playing with apps on their smart phones, texting friends and "chatting" each other.⁴

During typical meetings led by those in the older generations, there's protocol, there's an agenda, off track discussion, and most within this group wouldn't think of ending meetings prior to the two-hour slots set aside for them. Younger workers have unique skills developed through our modern technological and economic shift that doesn't "gel" with the protocol of traditional business meetings. According to Wendover, productive young workers generally have little patience for meetings they view as taking away from valuable work time or time to connect with customers. Their "fooling around in meetings"

may mean the agenda is not sufficient to hold their attention. He suggests considering if monthly meetings are better than weekly. What items can be shared electronically to be viewed when convenient? Could these meetings or at least part of them be accomplished via Skype, video conference call, or use special software such as MindJet Catalyst® or Papershow® to hold interactive business meetings.⁵ Finally, ask the younger workers for suggestions on how the meetings can be improved.

Good meetings can be a very useful tool for family businesses. However, good meetings don't just happen--they are designed. Producing a good meeting is like producing a great product. You don't just build it. You think about it, plan it, and design it. Family business meetings should not be just empty ritual to be suffered through before getting "back to work". Good meetings are events where real work takes place.⁶

References:

1. Allen, Kathleen. *Conducting Effective Business Meetings*. Retrieved 12/21/2011 from: www.dummies.com/how-to/content/conducting-effective-business-meetings.htm.
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3. Smith, Greg. *Top 7 Steps to Conducting More Effective Meetings*. Retrieved 1/2/2012 from: <http://top7business.com/?Top-7-Steps-To-Conducting-More-Effective-Meetings&id=408>
4. Wendover, Robert. Run meetings like a ninja, not a samurai. *Center for Generational Studies*. Retrieved 12/20/2011 from: www.generationaldiversity.com
5. Ibid., 2.
6. Imperato, Gina. *You Have to Start Meeting Like This!* Retrieved 12/21/2011 from: www.fastcompany.com/magazine/23/begeman.html

Conducting Effective Family Business Meetings



- ✓ Have a purposeful goal or objective
- ✓ Prepare a written agenda/strategy
- ✓ Stick to the set time-line
- ✓ Maintain the focus of the meeting; stay on track
- ✓ Be a good participant
- ✓ Record/report appropriate minutes; refrain from exhaustive notes
- ✓ Consider fewer (but better) meetings
- ✓ Always start and end on items that unite the family/meeting



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