By Eric P. Bloom

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10 Ways to spice up your staff meetings (Part 1)
Wow, there is nothing like a good weekly staff meeting to get the creative juices going and the work intensity flowing. I bet that as your reading this column you’re thinking fondly and nostalgically about last week’s meeting and you just can’t wait for the next staff meeting coming up in just a few days. Oh boy, it will be fun, exciting, inspirational, and an altogether great time!

Oh, your staff meetings are not like this. Don’t feel bad, neither are anyone else’s.

We all know that staff meetings are an important vehicle for coordinating team activities, informing your staff about critical company information, and as a way to build team cooperation and cohesiveness. So if they are so important why make them a necessary evil rather than at least a pseudo-interesting experience. The following ten ideas can help you make your staff meetings a little more tolerable and maybe a little fun.

1. Department book club
By book club, I don’t mean that latest action thriller or tear jerker, I’m referring to non-fiction business-oriented books related to the work your department performs. For example, if you are the VP of Human Resources, your books could be in the area of organizational design, talent management, salary and benefits, and other related topics. If you are the VP of Information Technology, your books could be on the various IT mega-trends, such as cloud computing, big data, Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), computer security and other related topics.

The way the book club works is that your team members are asked to read different books on a rotating schedule, having one member of your staff present a different book’s key points each week. For example, if you have eight people in your department, each person would be responsible for giving a book presentation once every eight weeks.

This approach has two valuable benefits for the members of your department. First, your team is learning new key concepts related to their profession on a weekly basis. Second, it provides the opportunity for your staff to practice their presentation skills on an ongoing basis.
For you as the manager, the book club also has two key advantages. First, it provides you the opportunity to train your staff on an ongoing basis at no financial cost. Second, it has the potential to bring new concepts into your group that may be of value to implement within your department.

2. Video of the week
The video of the week is a short video, most likely from YouTube, on a business topic related to your group. It could be used as a vehicle to enhance your team’s knowledge on a new technology, new government legislation, industry trend, or any other topic that you deem appropriate for your group. As an alternative to individual YouTube videos, it could be MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) shown one short video a week over an extended length of time. For example, if you are the VP of Marketing, you could use ten minutes of each weekly staff meeting to show a class segment on gamification, social media marketing, or big data analysis. Note that MOOC based classes are also free of charge.

3. Cartoon corner
If you are a cartoon enthusiast, spend a fun weekend collecting copies of your favorite cartoons from your local Sunday newspaper or online source. Then, have it as an official agenda item on your staff meeting and show one cartoon each week. It’s quick, it’s easy and it makes your staff meetings at least a little bit of fun. The only thing to consider regarding reprinting cartoons is to make sure that you have permission to do so legally.

4. Vendor Presentation
Vendor presentations are a great way to learn more about the products your team is using and/or supporting. Generally speaking, vendors appreciate the opportunity to present the new features in their latest products, the better ways to work with their company via the website, or just to do a question and answer session. If the vendor is located in another city or their allotted presentation time is too short to make it worth their while to attend in person, consider connecting them in via Skype or other online/webinar type tool. Also, vendor presentations are free of charge. My one suggestion, in fairness to the vendor, if you bring a vendor in to do a presentation, please make sure they know it’s informational and not a sales call.

Make sure to read next week’s column to learn about suggestions 5 through 10.

The primary advice and takeaways from today’s column is to know that:

- Staff meetings provide great value, but are generally not much fun.
- The suggestions described in this column can help enhance the value of your staff meetings to you, your team, and the company in general.

Until next time, work hard, work smart, manage well and continue to build your professional brand.

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