

The Business Meeting

By June Campbell

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You've received an invite to attend a meeting. You're not exactly anti-meeting. In fact, you can recollect attending one or two meetings in your lifetime in which something was actually accomplished. "I wonder if this meeting will be like that," you murmur wistfully.

You're a realist. You know the odds are against it.

The meeting's stated purpose is to, "Foster focused cohesion within the Doodad industry."

Huh? What's that mean? Why is focused cohesion necessary? Or even better, what is "focused cohesion" in the first place?

At least you know what the Doodad industry is.

And, you note, you're expected to RSVP prior to receiving the meeting's agenda. The agenda, it is promised, will be distributed later. Anyone having items to add should submit them as quickly as possible. Items deemed appropriate will be added to the Agenda.

Right. Warily, you send off your acceptance to attend the meeting. Industry politics being the way they are, you're safer attending than not.

The agenda arrives. After a cursory perusal, you are no further ahead. As written, none of the items make sense to you.

In time you receive a Revised Agenda containing new items. Then later, a second Revised Agenda. None of the Revisions are any clearer than the original.

The Big Day comes. Grudgingly, you pack your brief case with survival items including what turns out to be the wrong version of the Agenda, and head out. What the hey! You're only three weeks behind in your regular work right now with two major deadlines fast approaching. Nothing like wasting, er... spending ... a half day at a meeting.

It starts 15 minutes late while the host runs around locating chairs for attendees. Apparently, the need for one chair per rear end had not occurred to the organizers until just this minute. "Situation normal," you reflect.

The meeting is called to order and the guy to the right lights a cigarette.

"Oh my, " says Madam Chairperson. "Are we going to smoke at this meeting?"

To smoke or not to smoke is debated hotly. You can hear at least some of the conversation over the voices of the three people who are talking into their cell phones and the guy who's set up his laptop and is clacking away at that well-loved Windows feature, Solitaire.

Forty-five minutes later, the smoking decision is made, and it's back to business.

You calculate what your time is worth for an hour and decide that you've just spent \$75 worth listening to the Great Smoking Debate and \$25 observing Musical Chairs.

Madam Chairperson, clearly flustered by events thus far, launches into an introduction of New Business.

New Business, it turns out, includes the agenda items that have been submitted by invitees. Obviously, some squealed, "Carpe Diem" and "seized the opportunity" to brag about their company's accomplishments. All under the guise of Keeping the Industry Informed, of course.

"By what strange twist of fate did Madam Chairperson deem these items appropriate," you wonder tiredly. An hour later, New Business winds down. You have now spent \$200 worth of time and no end in site.

Next follows Refreshment Break, during which Solitaire Guy disappears, never to return. Lucky devil, either he's somebody's brother-in-law or he's planning on retiring next month, you decide.

The meeting re-assembles amid rumbles of dissention. People have to leave. The parking meter is running out. They have other appointments to attend.

"But," says Madam Chairperson, "We have not yet discussed our main agenda item. We must reschedule."

Instantly, like soldiers ready for battle, a line of PDA's and appointment books appear on the conference table. Papers shuffle, electronic devises hum. A second meeting date is set.

"Your Minutes will arrive by email tomorrow," calls the Recorder. "Let me know if there are corrections. We'll see you again next week."

And thus the eternal cycle continues.

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