



TECHNOLOGY

Zoom Out

Meeting fatigue can contribute to job dissatisfaction and a lack of productivity

BY WILLIESHA MORRIS

Up to 80 million meetings per day.

That's an estimate of how many meetings are held just in the United States, according to Lucid Meetings, a training and technology provider. Web conferencing platforms have made meetings simple to create, schedule and hold. On average, meetings within a company went from seven per month before the COVID-19 pandemic to 12 during the pandemic.

Are we meeting too frequently? Maybe, particularly when there's no agenda or there is one and people don't

stick to it, say lawyers interviewed by the *ABA Journal*.

Tim Sechler, an estate-planning lawyer based in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, says meetings without agendas or that go over time should be addressed by the manager. "In an increasingly remote work environment, it is important to know what people are doing with their time," he says.

Companies in other industry sectors are striking down meetings completely, including having no-meeting days and canceling recurring meetings.

There's even a book that addresses the meetings topic titled *Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business* written by Gino Wickman. The entrepreneur-focused publication includes details about its trademarked "Level 10 Meeting," which focus on starting on time, stopping on time and sticking to an agenda.

Sechler, who read *Traction*, holds a Level 10 Meeting weekly. If a topic pops up in the meeting, such as researching a new legal issue, it's pushed to the bottom of the agenda. The key is

prioritizing the most important issues—or what's known as "big rocks" in the business community—for each person and making sure projects are staying on track, Sechler says. "Off track" items also are pushed to the bottom of the agenda. If an item is "on track," it's never discussed again.

"This system protects the integrity of the meeting and prevents the new shiny thing from derailing everyone's time," Sechler says. "How we manage our practice is: 'Are we approaching these meetings with intentionality?'"

Sechler is the firm's name partner, but he doesn't lead the meetings. That's done by Sechler Law's operations director, who makes sure things stay on track and there's no fluff. Some of the most important questions to ask include making sure there's a specific meeting goal and canceling the meeting if there isn't one. Or determining whether the goal can be accomplished without meeting.

Some say the number of meetings grew during the pandemic because it's

easier to meet remotely than in person. However, the increase in virtual meetings is not necessarily more efficient, and having them back-to-back remotely can be exhausting because there's no buffer between end and start times, says Andrew Darcy, a supervising attorney at New York City's Mobilization for Justice.

He objects to standing weekly meetings with no agenda, so the team cancels them when that happens. "Every time you have a standing meeting, there is a decent likelihood that it will not be valuable because you must come up with things to talk about," Darcy says. "You have wasted time there."

He also supports meetings running short as long as you burn through the agenda.

"That's not only good for our schedules; I think that makes us focus and give value to those things that we're going to discuss," says Darcy, whose agency provides free civil representation to individuals with low incomes.

Quality over quantity

During the pandemic, a popular meme stating "This meeting could have been an email" began to show up on social media. But Molly McGrath, founder of the legal staffing firm Hiring & Empowering Solutions, says people are bogged down by emails, writing them can take a long time and sometimes it's hard to be articulate in the communications.

McGrath is also a fan of *Traction* and believes meetings should focus on three things: clients, expectations and productivity levels. Level 10 Meetings, she adds, foster collaboration for everyone, from top-level executives to contractors.

"They all have a stake in winning because they need to get answers so they can move their files forward. So they can do a good job, have great performance reviews and maybe reach their bonus," McGrath says.

When McGrath talks to people looking for a new job, she says their

biggest complaint is lack of communication or a breakdown in adequate communication. There's little to no collaboration or connection.

However, she strongly disagrees with eliminating meetings. "We have to remember we are hiring human beings, and human beings need connection."

McGrath believes that when COVID-19 pushed us to having remote "daily huddle" meetings, this contributed to better communication and productivity.

But attorneys and staff resent meetings that aren't managed well, she adds. Besides running a good meeting that stays on topic, she advocates training employees to be prepared for meetings with applicable reporting information, and if they are bringing up issues, they should also have proposed solutions ready to share.

"When people complain about meetings, it's because they're not impactful and they're not properly facilitated," McGrath says. ■

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

FREE MEMBER BENEFIT CLE

- ▶ Over 675 programs
- ▶ Webinars and on-demand
- ▶ Expert speakers / trending topics

ambar.org/freecle

ABA THE PREMIER SOURCE FOR CLE

