

# 4 Signs Your Meetings Are a Waste of Time

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**Small business owners can spot them, correct them and define “efficient meeting.”**

Some companies have such ineffective meetings that they hire consultants to fix the problem. But small business owners needn't reach for the checkbook to make the most of their meetings. Look for these four warning signs your meetings are wasting time.

**#1 Red flag: The meeting's purpose is to exchange information and updates.**

**The fix:** Eliminate these meetings. This can be handled via email or an online shared tool/project management portal—such as Google Docs, Dropbox, Evernote or Basecamp (the former three are free; Basecamp plans start at \$20/month)—in which everyone can write and view updates, says Elene Cafasso, founder and president of executive/personal coaching firm Enerpace, Inc. in Elmhurst, Ill.

**#2 Red flag: There isn't an agenda or an end time.**

**The fix:** Open-ended meetings present a great risk for rambling, tangents and rabbit holes—from all participants. Before calling any meeting, ask yourself what you want to get out of it, says Brandon Smith, founder of The Workplace Therapist consultancy and a workplace dynamics/leadership professor at Emory University in Atlanta.

Avoid broad goals such as “brainstorming.” Instead, be specific regarding actionable items. Once you've defined a clear, focused objective (and firm time limit) for the meeting, draft an agenda containing discussion points that will help achieve your objective and distribute the agenda to attendees 24 hours in advance.

**#3 Red flag: There's a packed house.**

**The fix:** Less is always more when it comes to meetings, says Smith. Efficiency and lean attendance go hand in hand, so make sure each attendee can help accomplish the meeting's objective.

To determine this, consider who has responsibility over the meeting's topic, who has information pertinent to the decision or discussion and who could be affected by the outcome.

**Red flag: There's no progress following the meeting.**

**The fix:** Even if a meeting is focused and concise, it will be a waste of time if the objective isn't carried out afterward. End each meeting by confirming the action items each person is responsible for. Then, begin the next meeting by “reviewing old business,” says Garry Polmateer, managing partner of Salesforce consultancy firm Red Argyle in Canandaigua, N.Y. Ask attendees about specific action items from the previous meeting to ensure they do not vanish once it's over.