



The 25-minute meeting

Story by:

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Meetings generally get a bad rap. Some see them as a pointless drain on valuable work time. For others, they're a great reason to get a sneaky hour of Candy Crush in while looking as if you're paying attention. It's hard to find anyone who actually finds them valuable.

Look inside any medium-to-large organisation and you're likely to find endless, schedule-sapping gatherings that seem designed to give the appearance of progress while actually delivering the opposite.

Career progression seems to lead inexorably to yet more meetings, sucking hordes of middle-managers into the vortex of calendar hell, leaving them little time to do their actual job while simultaneously sapping their will to succeed.

It's this cultural norm that Donna McGeorge tackles in *The 25-Minute Meeting: Half the time, double the impact*.

McGeorge's premise is that any meeting will automatically expand to occupy the time allotted whether the subject requires that amount of time or not, and that almost any meeting can be executed in 25 minutes.

I will admit to approaching this book with a degree of scepticism. While not a fan of meetings, I like to think I've developed techniques to get the most of out of the time I have available while at work, largely to maintain a healthy work/life balance. However, I was forced to reassess when I found myself cringing several times as I recognised my own behaviour.

Despite its chirpy, motivational poster style, McGeorge's book is easy to digest and full of useful, practical tips to change the meeting culture in your organisation.

Some of it is pretty obvious. Like turning up on time and banning device use (unless you are on call or imminently expecting a baby); being prepared; having a clear purpose; and distributing pre-reading to meeting attendees ahead of time. Other tips offer a more strategic approach to improving your meeting game, with practical exercises designed to reinforce the book's lessons.

McGeorge uses anecdotes and useful examples, and addresses almost any meeting challenge. I enjoyed her anecdote of a manager beset by punctuality problems who locked latecomers out of meetings and the decisions made within, and refused to reschedule when they complained about the outcome.

I might have to try that myself.

The 25 Minute Meeting by Donna McGeorge (Wiley, \$24.95). Stuart Fagg is general manager digital, The Australian and News Prestige Network