Meetings—

You can inspire promptness

By Fred Pryor, Founding Publisher of THE PRYOR REPORT

Anyone who has chaired a committee, headed a team or managed an office has wrestled with the problem of having people come into meetings late.

Do you ignore the latecomers? Catch them up — or let them wonder? Harrangue your group about being on time? Lock the door at 9 a.m.?

Probably none of the above is a good solution. Your challenge is finding a way to break the “late” habit in a way that won’t be conducive to escalating, threatening or rude. It can be done.

Begin by understanding that being late is symptomatic of another problem. If you accept that, you can ask yourself if you can do something about the way you run the meeting that will make it easier for people to be on time.

A meeting is a tool that needs to be sharpened regularly. It can easily fall into disrepair, becoming dull and off its mark. We’ve all been in meetings where discussion became conversation, straying into areas far removed from the session’s goals. Boredom replaces the excitement of shared objectives. Lethargy sets in making people skittish and concerned about time they’re “wasting.”

Make a checklist before your next meeting:

1. Are you convinced of the meeting’s importance?
2. Have you accurately presented its importance to the attendees?
3. Does each person know why he or she, individually, should be there?
4. Are the ultimate goals of the meeting clear to all from the outset?
5. Does each participant know his or her responsibilities for making the session efficient?
6. Have you made it a practice to give feedback from one meeting to the next on each participant’s contributions?
7. At the end of each session, have you made certain each person knew what is meant to happen before the next one?
8. Do you set the next meeting before you adjourn the present one?

Now that you have examined content and procedures, look at the physical and mental atmosphere of your meetings:

1. Is room temperature comfortable?
2. Are lighting and seating adequate?
3. Would TV or other visual aids improve your transfer of information?
4. Do your participants appear to be present both physically and mentally?
5. Is there a good feeling among the individuals in the group? Is there a team spirit with common commitment to goals?
6. Is the action rapid enough so that no one feels that time is being wasted?

Now, if those atmospheric items seem to be in order, start working on your own skills as the group’s leader.

1. Begin on time. Don’t feel compelled to catch up latecomers on business they have missed unless it is vital to the success of the meeting.
2. Bring everyone into the discussion.
3. Ferret out those members with communication skills, oral and written, and use each to his or her best advantage as you dispense assignments.
4. When your meeting ends, enlist the help of the group in assessing its success — with a view toward improving the effectiveness of future sessions. Ask: “What worked?” “What didn’t?” “Did we achieve our goals?” “Is this meeting a good idea?” “Do we need more? Fewer?”

Colleagues in an organization keyed to results will have mutual respect for one another’s time. If your meetings are profitable and productive, it will be clear to everyone that you treat their time with high regard.

They will likely respond by doing likewise.