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Tuesday, Jan 27, 2004

## Business

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### THE GREAT EMPLOYEE ESCAPE

Workers find meetings tedious, ineffective and overdone

By Diane E. Lewis  
The Boston Globe

Say the words "office meeting," and some workers dive for cover.

A survey of 1,216 U.S. employees commissioned by Interactive Meeting Solutions, a high-tech meeting firm in California, indicates that 29 percent of workers attend three or more meetings per week and 34 percent say most are a "complete waste of time."



The random survey was conducted by Opinion Research Corp. of Princeton. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

The survey found that some workers bring their Palm Pilots and cellphones to meetings to liven up or escape a dull gathering. In all, 8 percent of the workers polled said they played electronic games at meetings; 14 percent of those workers were 18 to 24 years old, IMS said. To escape a boring meeting, 5 percent of workers have had a friend or co-worker give them a bogus page or cellphone call.

"Handled incorrectly, the modern meeting has to rank as one of America's most excruciating and masochistic workplace experiences around," IMS President Chuck McPherson said. "And a bad meeting only creates yet another bad meeting."

The survey does offer some good news: Meetings at small companies tend to be more effective than those at bigger ones.

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Small companies also conduct fewer meetings. Thirty-seven percent of the workers at large companies attend three or more work-related meetings each week, compared with just 21 percent of the workers at small companies.

Sixty-seven percent of workers at large companies, compared with 52 percent at small ones, said their meetings could benefit from more honesty. Additionally, 35 percent of the workers at big companies said that if people were really truthful at a meeting, they would probably get fired. Only 24 percent of the workers at small companies said they'd get the ax for being honest.

Of those employed by big companies, 50 percent said they have attended a meeting where an employee fell asleep. Only 26 percent of people at small companies said they have seen a worker fall asleep.

### Who's sitting around your conference table?

#### The player

This person often uses electronic devices such as cellphones, pagers or laptops to create the appearance of being productive during round table.

#### The doodler

Initially, this meeting-goer desires to be attentive, but eventually she subconsciously converts her copious notes into an elaborate grocery list.

#### Dazed and confused

Characterized by being present in body, but mentally absent because of meeting exhaustion.

#### The drifter

Often escapes the monotony of too many unproductive meetings because of over-exertion. Excessive nodding, half-closed eyes and light snoring make this technique obvious.


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