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HEADLINE: News flash: America has little use for meetings

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BODY:

If meetings are supposed to be eye-openers, how come we're falling asleep?

You'd think Sleepy, Snoozy and Dozy ran corporate America.

Actually, they must -- at least here.

Indianapolis and the Midwest have more snoozing meeting-goers than any other region in the nation, according to a new survey that takes a look at what's going on at America's meetings.

A whopping 42 percent of workers in the Midwest said they actually had witnessed someone dozing off during a meeting. Whether they got the fun of watching them snore and drool is still a secret.

"I don't know what's going on there with you guys," says Chuck McPherson, president of the Santa Rosa, Calif.-based Interactive Meeting Solutions, which surveyed more than 1,200 workers nationwide. "Must be the cold weather or something."

Nope. I think a little chill would do us some good. Maybe a glass of ice water poured over our heads -- just to keep us awake. Anything to make those mind-numbing meetings fun, effective -- maybe even stimulating?

Tip #1 to liven up a boring meeting: Walk into the session wearing a disposable paper face mask. Tell the group: "Hey, you don't want to catch what I've got." Watch people squirm as you look for a seat.

I just got out of a meeting where there was at least hope for a sugar rush. A chocolate chip cookie the size of Monument Circle.

Thanks boss. No one nodded off.

But it's clearly not the case nationwide. What the survey revealed is what he and American workers have known all along, McPherson says.

Meetings are so-o-o lame.

For most employees (34 percent), the meetings they attend are a "complete waste of time," according to the survey.

McPherson says the problem is this: too many meetings.

Almost a third of the work force (29 percent) attends three or more a week. For many, that's more like three a day.

And in most cases, what's accomplished in those marathon meetings could be completed in a 15-minute session. Talk about shameful planning. Pitiful productivity. Think of all the work we could get done without all those meetings.

Tip #2 to liven up a boring meeting: Bring a hand puppet, preferably an animal, and ask it to clarify difficult points throughout the meeting.

Technology may just be the key to beating the boardroom blues, says McPherson.

Instead of an hour face-to-face, try a five-minute videoconference. Instead of a 20-minute phone conversation, try a 20-second text message.

"Despite all of our advances in science and technology, the art of the American meeting is still very low-tech and low-touch," he says.

But technology can be abused. The most widespread use of technology in America's meeting rooms is playing games on Palm Pilots and cell phones, the survey says.

And don't forget that handy pager that can be used to get you "called out" of a dull gathering.

According to the survey, 8 percent of American workers are guilty of tech misuse while a meeting is in session. For the younger generation, the 20-somethings, it's even more prevalent -- 14 percent.

Tip #3 to liven up a boring meeting: Rubberneck at the notes of the person sitting next to you. Copy them word for word and subvocalize as you do. See how long it takes before they snap.

When they do? Bolt.

Boring meeting tips are courtesy of Bob Rosner, who recently released his book, "Gray Matters: Confessions of a Workplace Sinner!"

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Survey of U.S. workers in meetings

- * 20 percent say they are wallflowers.
- * 55 percent say meeting bullies dominate the sessions.
- * 73 percent make sure their point of view is heard.
- * 30 percent say if they said what they really wanted, they would get fired.

Want to rate effectiveness (or dullness) of your company's meetings? Go to www.meetingtruths.com and fill out a survey.

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