



### My Work/Life Balance Lessons

by Matt Papenfus

I didn't apply what I knew about work-life balance to my own life until I had already achieved a certain amount of success at Turner.

I married for the first time at 34, just months after moving to the Southeast in 2003 for my current position as vice president and general manager, Texas. Until my wife and I had a daughter 18 months ago, I worked long hours and weekends to help this region achieve its potential. But as so many Turner employees know, becoming a parent changes your perspective on a lot of things, including the amount of time you spend away from home for your career.

Here are some of the things I've done to help me spend more work-free time with my family while maintaining my necessary productivity level.

**I've accepted that I will never get all of my work done.** We all have a lot of work to do. That won't change.

**I prioritize my work so I accomplish what's most important first.** Some people have trouble doing this, especially when they are overwhelmed by volume. If you're not sure what's most important, ask.

**I don't compare my work/life balance needs with anyone else's.** A good fit for me might not be a good fit for you, and vice versa. For example, checking messages when I'm vacationing reduces my stress level while others might be more stressed if they're in touch with the office.

**I take advantage of my commute to and from work.** Sometimes I use my 40-minute drive home to run through the day's events and sort through my priorities for the next day. Other times, I listen to the radio - instead of the thoughts in my head - to transition out of work mode.

**I leave work at work.** I don't even take a briefcase home unless I'm traveling the next day. And I often succeed at ignoring my Blackberry when it's vibrating on the counter.

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### Shorter, More Effective Meetings

The biggest time waster in organizations today is an unproductive meeting....and another under productive meeting...and another. The cost of the average meeting, including salaries, expenses, and opportunity costs is estimated at \$5000. Implementing the simple tips that follow can cut the time and costs of your organization's meetings in half while multiplying the productive results for you and everyone attending.

**(Reading time 180 seconds)**

What is the primary purpose of most meetings, Thinking or Communicating? Put another way, when should the thinking for an important meeting be done? If you have a key meeting coming up with your boss, or your best client, and you know its purpose, when should most of the thinking for that session be completed? Right. The thinking should be done before the meeting. Unfortunately, in most meetings, in most organizations, thinking ahead of time happens too rarely. Attendees have not thought through what they need to say and to find out. When asked what they think they typically pause, then chatter, "Well I think that, ah...well... (blah, blah, blah)." They are Thinking by Talking Out Loud. As a result, meetings that should last 20 to 30 minutes end up lasting one, two, three hours or more.

#### Correcting the Thinking by Talking Out Loud Meeting

As little as 5 minutes advance thinking time by each participant can cut hours off of a meeting. You personally can play a big role in correcting this tremendous time waster by ALWAYS blocking some Think Time to do the following simple preparation:

With your thinking time write down the following:

The three most important things I need to say at this meeting are

The three most important things I need to find out are

With this done, when I'm asked at the meeting, "what do you think, Jim?" I can say, "I think that (1, 2, 3) and to move forward I need to know (a) from you John, (b) from you Sue, and approval of (c) from you Carol." Instead of 10 to 15 minutes of rambling discussion, my most important points and input needed is delivered in one to three minutes. By firmly implementing this one thing, expecting everyone to block think time in their calendar before every meeting, most organizations can cut meeting time by 50% or more. By doing this religiously you will create a great reputation for yourself. Wow, you know your stuff! You will also set an example and expectation that will improve the meeting performance of others.

Obviously, to do your list of three and three, you will need to know the purpose of the meeting. As a result, if the person who called the meeting hasn't put out a clear agenda, or verbally told you what the purpose is, you need to contact him or her and ask. "Just so I can come in prepared for the meeting, what is your primary objective for the meeting? What conclusions and actions do you want to come out of it?"

Now, should all meetings be this structured? What about brainstorming meetings? Don't we want a lot of thinking by talking out loud and cross polenization of ideas some times? Certainly. But for staff meetings, project update meetings, budget meetings, client review meetings, MOST MEETINGS... the primary purpose is communication. The bulk of the thinking should be done ahead of time!

This doesn't mean you don't think at each meeting. Certainly you do. But

## Quotes from Confucius

*"Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.*

*"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."*

*"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."*

*"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."*

Confucius (551BC-479BC) Confucius was a teacher, scholar and minor political official whose commentary on Chinese literary classics developed into a pragmatic philosophy for daily life.

having clarity of thought ahead of time keeps that meeting thinking focused on the current objectives. When new, off subject thinking comes up, do not let it take you off the objective of the meeting. If it is a potentially good new idea that comes up, capture it in writing. "Put it in the parking lot" as some of our clients say, to return to with that individual later or to include in another meeting. You can suggest that even if you are not in charge of the meeting. Otherwise, that new idea, which has not been thought through, will turn the current meeting into a meandering, non-conclusive, thinking by talking out loud meeting. Successfully reaching conclusions and taking action on one meeting's purpose at a time is an achievement.

### When You Are in Charge - Giving Notice to Block Think Time

If you are calling a meeting, be in command of it. Expect participants to come prepared. To do this you need to take 10 to 20 minutes to save hours by doing the following:

- o Only ask individuals to attend that are vital to the purpose
- o Send out an agenda far enough in advance for participants to prepare. State specifically, "The purpose of this meeting is..."
- o When you distribute the agenda, ask everyone to block 5 to 10 minutes in their calendar to list the three major things they would like to say on the subject and three things they need to find out. "To save everyone time we will conduct the meeting around those three top input items and questions that each of you have. Please come prepared with those items."

Have your own most important input and questions prepared. Don't call a meeting without knowing the decisions and outcomes you are looking for. Quickly get the top three input items and questions from each participant. Keep it on topic. You will recognize when it's sliding into a thinking by talking out loud meeting. Move it on - "Have you given us your top three input items now? Thanks. Very helpful. .... John, what are yours?" Or, "That's a potentially valuable idea. I'm going to write that down and let's you and I come back to it after this meeting. It warrants a separate focus of it's own... John, what are your top three items on (state purpose of meeting)?"

What if you need to call a meeting quickly, like right now. Well, instead of right now, make it 10 minutes from now. Give each person attending the verbal agenda and purpose, and ask them to take 5 of the next 10 minutes before the meeting to Think. "Please use that time to come to the meeting with a summary of your top three input items on the subject and the top three items you need input on."

### Eliminating Meetings

Everyone blocking individual Think Time can eliminate many meetings altogether. Just ask each selected, vital participant to email you his or her top three input items and questions on the meeting objective. Summarize their responses, draw conclusions, make a decision or decision recommendation and email it back to all the vital participants for final input and agreement.

There are many other tips and methods our clients use to greatly reduce meeting time. Expecting everyone to BLOCK THINK TIME, before the meeting, is the most critical.

Whether you are a participant in a meeting or you called the meeting you have a responsibility to everyone attending. Don't waste their time. Block think time before the meeting. You will get what you want from the meeting and your style and results will be recognized and appreciated.

Jim Bird, Publisher