

# tools of the trade

## **Making Meetings Work**

*How To Make Meetings Work. Michael Doyle and David Straus. Chicago: Playboy Press, 1976. 299 pp. \$2.50 (paper).*

We are a "meeting society"—a world made up of small groups that come together to share information, plan, solve problems, criticize or praise, make new decisions, or find out what went wrong with old ones. Doyle and Straus, principals of a consulting firm devoted to meeting facilitation services and training, say that when you add up how much time you actually spend in meetings, you may surprise yourself.

Sit through 8 hours of meetings a week during a 30-year career and you've devoted 12,480 hours to meetings! They also suggest that the more successful you become, the more time you spend in meetings—if you're in middle management, you probably spend about 35% of your working week in meetings. If you're in top management, that figure may grow to more than 50% of your work week. That means that over half of the rest of your organizational life may be spent in meetings!

Many meetings produce only frustration, fury, or costly lost time. The Doyle-Straus book suggests explicit ideas and actions, accompanied by simple charts and forms, for making meetings effective and capable of producing the results we choose. Their focus is on the "Interaction Method," which gives everybody a feeling of greater participation and influence, and provides useful ideas whether you're a decision maker, leader, or rank-and-file meeting goer.

The authors divide meetings into several types: problem solving, decision making, planning, reporting/presenting, reacting/evaluating, and combinations of these. They then describe specific behaviors and step-by-step procedures for each type.

The chapter on working in problem-solving groups is excellent. It provides clear guidelines for keeping such meetings

focused on the problems and avoiding the typical bogging down that occurs because public problems are complex and because each tentative decision seems to lead to another set of problems.

Also useful are their suggestions for evaluating your own meetings. The evaluation procedure will help identify meeting weaknesses as well as reinforce positive factors.

The appendix provides useful summaries such as "Eighteen Steps to a Better Meeting" and a "Meeting Diagnostic Sheet and Checklist."