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Book Review

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The Strategy of Meetings

By George David Kieffer

Warner Books, Inc., New York

Reviewed by Chris Fugate, CPA, Stone Mountain, GA

Is there anyone who has not sat through a meeting, bored to distraction, exasperated at the lack of productive action, frustrated by the inadequacy of personal involvement? Kieffer recognizes that such meetings take place all too often. He feels that what will solve the problem of nonproductive meetings is training in the attendance of, chairing of and/or contribution to meetings. Such training will create what Kieffer terms "meeting masters."

According to Kieffer, the first step in becoming a meeting master involves attitudes about meetings in general. The professional must realize that every meeting is a win or loss. If he has allocated his valuable time to a meeting, then he has made a decision that that meeting will be the most efficient use of that block of time. Should he fail to profit from the meeting, he has not just been killing time; he has lost the productivity that could have been derived from other activities.

If the theory that every meeting is a win or loss is accepted, the next question is how to win the meeting, how to know which meetings are profitable to attend. Kieffer gives some indications of when to say no to a meeting, in part or in whole, a few of which are listed below:

- You can't say what you want to accomplish or what the meeting is supposed to accomplish.
- Notwithstanding the purpose, you don't believe the meeting will serve it by virtue of its authority, composition, or timing.
- You cannot be prepared.
- You cannot control the meeting to achieve your ends, and your absence will require rescheduling.

Once the decision has been made to attend a meeting, the professional must do his homework. He must realize that the outcome of the meeting will in all probability depend upon the quality of preparation done beforehand. Kieffer's method of preparation involves first envisioning the meeting. He recommends envisioning the meeting scenarios available based on the agenda and the persons attending, then choosing the preferred one. Once there is a vision of the desired outcome, what must occur prior to the meeting so that the vision can become reality can more easily be identified.

At the meeting, much can be done to bring about the desired outcome. Starting with the right attitude, having high expectations for both personal and group behavior, aids performance. People perform better when they believe in themselves. During the course of the meeting, the professional needs to be aware of his environment, alert to the effects of the meeting arena. He should try to set the stage that will be most supportive of his goals.

Kieffer writes that meetings are theater: "You cannot 'eliminate' theater in a meeting any more than you can eliminate location or costume or seating. There is always some location, some mode of dress, some seating - some theater - all of which conveys a message."

Kieffer continues his meeting master training with a discussion of the vitalness of the agenda. He maintains that whoever controls the agenda controls the meeting. He gives some good examples of agendas that can be effective in achieving aims. He follows this with an analysis of the order of discussion, tips for leading, combat pointers, and the importance of meeting followup.

Kieffer has recognized that there is a dearth of material on meetings management. He has addressed the problem in a comprehensive, insightful manner. As Kieffer writes in the Introduction, "... it [this book]* is intended to encourage you to begin to think strategically about the meetings you attend or lead. ... Meetings are more fundamental to good management than most people think. If you're wasting this precious resource, you're hurting your career." Becoming a meeting master should be the goal of every professional interested in maximizing his potential.

American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants Calls for Literary Award Nominations

Nominations for the 1989-1990 Literary Awards are currently being accepted by the Literary Award Committee. The Literary Awards are to be given at the joint annual meeting of the American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants and the American Society of Woman Accountants to be held in Washington, D.C. from October 17-20, 1990. The awards are to recognize outstanding contributions made to accounting literature by women (not necessarily members of AWSCPA or ASWA). To be eligible for the award, an article must be authored by one or more women only and be published during the time period from April 1, 1989 through March 31, 1990.

Nominations should be sent to Dr. Anne C. Riley, KCBA-Department of Accounting, The American University, 4400 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016-8044. Nominations should include a copy of the article with the name and address of the publisher. Nominations will close on June 15, 1990.