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If You Want to Be On Time, Make Sure You End On Time

Michael Preston
University of Central Florida

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If You Want to Be On Time, Make Sure You End On Time

By Michael Preston
UCF Forum columnist
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Welcome to 2016! It is a new year and, of course, a new you.

Many of us have taken the rollover of the calendar as a chance to make changes and reaffirm commitments. Usually these decisions take the form of the New Year's resolution.

We are great at making promises, but unfortunately are lousy at keeping them. Likely you are one of those who have made and failed to keep your resolution.

But here's one resolution I'm going to try to keep this year: End meetings on time.

A recent Harris poll points out that 47 percent of all resolutions express some sort of desire to improve productivity, with improving time management being at the top of the list. It is commonly accepted that most of us value being on time. If you are running late you are usually anxious and forced to apologize once you arrive, and if you are waiting on someone who is running late you are usually annoyed and feel the offender is disruptive and rude.

But a closer look at the data reveals what we really hate about poor time management.

A 2010 Ipsos market research poll found that the most common pet peeve of workers was poorly run meetings that either start late or end late because of poor planning or structure. The reasons the polled workers were annoyed included: cutting into personal time, making them late for their next meeting, or meetings were unproductive and provided no direction.

With this information as a backdrop, my resolution is simple: End on time.

In 2016 when I am leading a meeting, then my No. 1 goal, structurally, will be to end on time. In many ways we cannot help if participants arrive on time. Everyone is responsible for their own time management. But what each one of us can do is commit to ending meetings on time so they are not the reason someone is late to another meeting.

Ending on time has value for everyone involved.

In a 2014 Inc. magazine article, workers and managers who committed to ending meetings on time found that their meetings never felt as long as they did before being committed to ending on time. If you know when you will finish, then you are more efficient with your time. Participants arrived on time more frequently. Managers reported that they became better at building agendas and leading more efficient conversations.

Another good outcome was that participants felt more positive about the meeting and the outcomes. Because the meeting is confined to a set time, participants began and ended with a better attitude.

Intuitively having a time limit makes sense.

Think about the last two minutes of a closely contested basketball or football game. Usually both the offense and defense play with more urgency and more efficiency, and the play is more thrilling. Because there is less time to get a positive result, the need to produce under the threat of running out of time creates excitement. Meetings can have that same energy, however it is important to keep a few things in mind.

The quality-improvement office at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) suggests the synergy created by ending meetings on time only works if participants are well aware that ending on time is a priority that will be followed. Once participants have accepted the meeting will end on time, then they can reduce the number of meeting “killers,” including going off topic and planning an agenda with too many items to complete in the allotted time.

At the University of Wisconsin they also suggest appointing a timekeeper, placing a visible clock in the room, and if the meeting does need to go over, allowing participants to leave if they need to be at another meeting. All of these suggestions can keep you on task and working efficiently. In addition, it can help to curb the lateness domino effect,

in which one late meeting results in all your meetings and appointments running late the rest of the day.

I'm going to try to maintain this resolution this year for another big reason. Perhaps it will influence others—whose meetings I'm sometimes invited to—to finish on time so I can get to lunch before the lunch crowd...

Michael Preston is executive director of the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities based at UCF. He can be reached at michael.preston@ucf.edu.