

Meetings don't have to be a waste of time

By Berny Dohrmann

In survey after survey, meetings get knocked by everyone from employees to senior executives as being among the biggest waste of work hours.

In one poll, by Office Team, 45 percent of senior executives said their firms would be more productive if they banned all meetings at least one day a week.

The problem that often occurs -- beyond the obvious, like lacking a clear agenda -- is the underlying current of competition that each person brings to the table.

Competition pulls people apart; cooperation brings them together. Signs that competition is causing unproductive meetings include one or two people dominating the floor; individuals touting their achievements; people consistently failing to contribute their ideas because they fear being criticized or ridiculed.

The drive to compete is so ingrained in most of us, we often don't recognize it.

We get it culturally. We learn it in school. It's often reinforced within our own families as we're growing up. We have to be aware of that and identify the culture we want, then set about creating it -- beginning with our meetings.

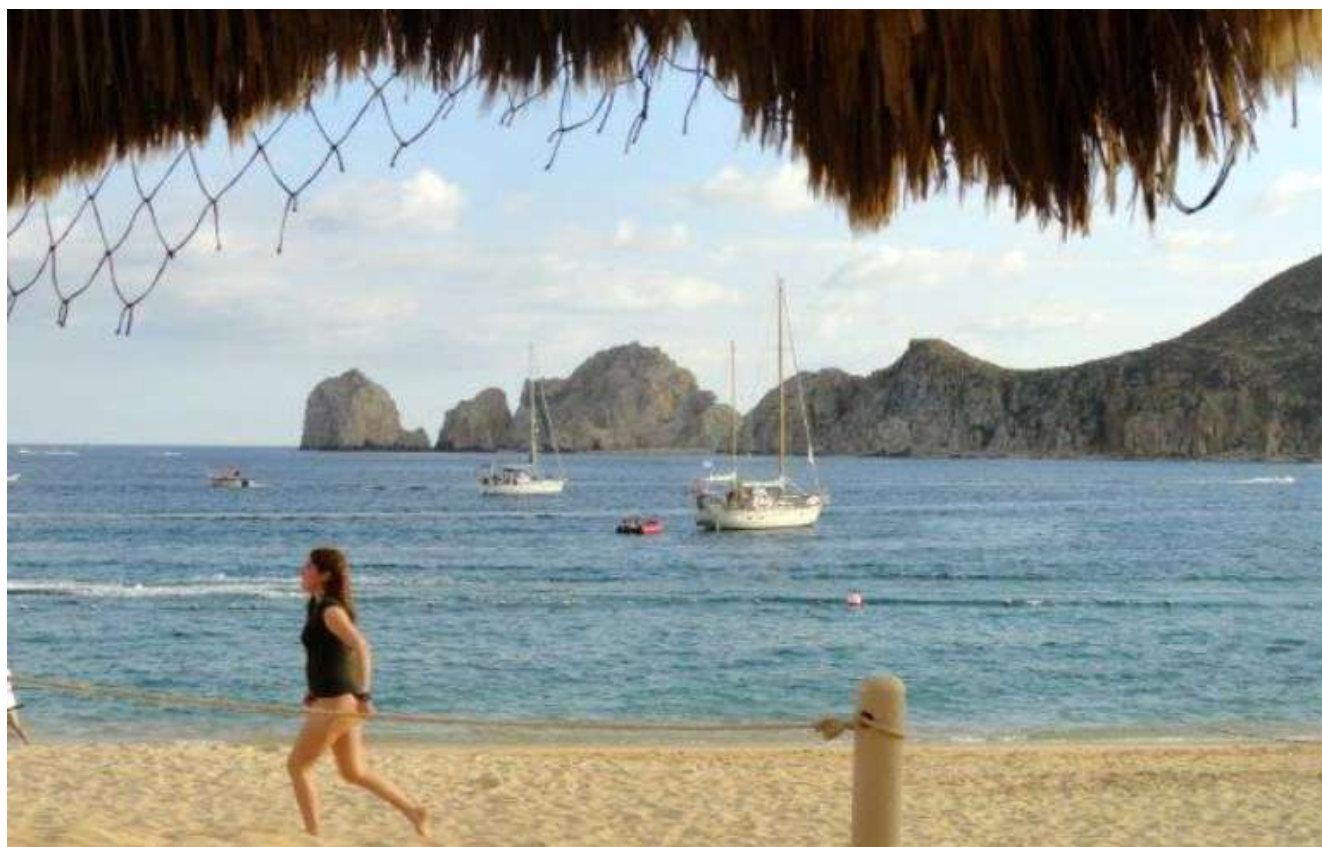
Cooperative meetings yield far better results. People working together toward a goal are more efficient, more productive, and even happier. The group pulling together toward the same goal will achieve that goal far more quickly than individuals each pulling in opposite directions.

How can you turn competition into cooperation – and wasted meetings into fruitful gatherings? Here are some suggestions:

- Begin instituting culture change by rewarding cooperative behavior. When someone makes a suggestion that can help another individual or department, publicly acknowledge and praise that teamwork. Encourage inter-departmental interest, empathy and even personal bonds by allowing employees from one area to shadow employees from another. Remind everyone that when one department succeeds, everyone succeeds. Look for managers and employees who tend to be naturally cooperative and enlist them as mentors and leaders to encourage and spread the new culture.
- Identify and curb competitive behavior in meetings. Avoid discouraging the behavior with tactics that rely on public criticism, scorn or ridicule. Rather, set egalitarian standards, such as time limits for each person to speak, and stick to them. When someone strays off topic, discern whether he or she is sharing a potentially valuable idea or seeking a personal competitive advantage (i.e. by laying blame, self-promoting, etc.) before steering him back on topic.
- Participation is essential to cooperation. Require everyone to participate in meetings. Circulate the agenda in advance with the stated expectation that each attendee will come to the table prepared to address at least one item – even if it's not an item within their area of responsibility. Participation is a key component of a cooperative work group and making it the norm is often as simple as getting everyone into the habit.

Berny Dohrmann is chairman and founder of CEO Space International, one of the largest support organizations for business owners.

Cabo beckons those in search of winter warmth



Warm waters of Cabo are perfect for swimming – even in winter.
Photos/Robert S. Wood

By Robert S. Wood

BAJA, Mexico – A winter visit to the tip of Baja in Mexico offers the quickest, easiest access I know to warm semi-tropical ocean beaches. Deanne and I like to visit shortly after Thanksgiving, when the water is still swimming pool warm – October can be too hot – before the snowbirds and spring breakers arrive in force and room prices double for the holidays.

We're currently just back from three December weeks, where daily temps hit the low 80s, the ocean was a balmy 75. We walked the beach barefoot at night in shorts. That's fairly typical Cabo winter weather, with low Tropic of Capricorn humidity. Farther south in coastal Mexico. It gets warmer, but can be sticky, and the Pacific Ocean swimming isn't half so good as at sheltered Cabo.

The 1,000-mile long rugged desert peninsula hangs like a beard off the bottom of California. At its tip are two contrasting Mexican towns, Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo. They are joined by a fancy 25-mile seaside divided highway. This trio comprises Cabo, with its sport fishing yacht harbors, glitzy hotels, golf courses, condos, gringo enclaves and white sand beaches.

One inland airport – “Cabos International” – serves both towns, first heading south to San Jose, then turning west to Cabo. It's mostly traveled via local buses, hotel shuttles and taxis. It's also possible to drive your car or camper, or take a Mexican bus all the way down from the border on a fascinating and still wild 1,000 miles of third-rate blacktop through the desert.



Time to relax.

There's also primitive car ferryboat service from the Mexican mainland, though not directly to the Cabo area. During the past 30 years, we've tried every approach. For years we used to drive our old '56 Chevy camper van down from Tahoe,

stopping at little beaches and fishing camps along the way to trade our frozen steaks for fresh catch, camping on the beach or rare campgrounds. That can still be done, and there are more campgrounds now, even at the tip.

Cruise ships also visit Cabo, but not as a final destination – unless you jump ship, which I've seriously considered.

The two towns are wildly different. Cabo San Lucas is an old fishing village built around a handsome yacht harbor full of gleaming white fishing yachts. It lies only yards from the big surf of the wild Pacific Ocean, just behind Lands End and the famous granite arch that shelters Medano Beach.

Medano is the best, safest place to swim in water as clear and blue as Lake Tahoe – and always much warmer. All beaches are open to the public, with white clad Mexican vendors trudging through the sand to sell jewelry, rugs, clothing and crafts. We find them authentically charming, but some think them annoying, though it is their country.

Downtown Cabo behind the marina is home to the Giggling Marlin, Cabo Wabo, Squid Roe, raucous nightclubs, nightly girlie shows, swim with dolphins concessions, billfishing tournaments, ziplines, harborside cafes, dune buggy and Wave Rider rentals, loud salsa beach cafes (The Office, Mango Deck, Billigans) that are popular with spring breakers, sunset booze and dinner cruises, snorkeling tours, and glass-bottom boat trips to famous Lovers Beach behind Lands End.



Lodging options run the gamut.

There is also Wal-Mart, McDonald's and Costco, acres of gift shops – and the billboards are mostly in English. You can mostly drink the water and safely eat from taco stands. And your Mexican hosts are mainly friendly, cheerful and smiling, grateful to be living where they do.

In stark contrast, San Jose del Cabo at the eastern tip of the beard is a quiet, younger, charming Mexican village, with attractive outdoorsy restaurants, art galleries, museums, a new yacht harbor and nature park. It sits on rocky shores interspersed with beaches, but they are not safe for ocean swimming.

Clearly, Cabo is the happening place. We stay nearby at Club Cascadas on Medano Beach for the great swimming, only rarely walking – no car needed – into town or the harbor for dinner, where food is decidedly more expensive than at Tahoe. At Cascadas – funky architecture under waving palms – you can buy packages of as few as four beachside timeshare weeks quite reasonably – or expensive villas with third floor swimming pools or lifetime perpetual legacies.

The handsomely landscaped “corridor” that joins these two contrasting towns is locally known as “The Four Lane”. It provides access to the string of destination, side-by-side luxury hotels, most with championship golf courses and many

swimming pools, with sometimes swimmable beaches. But they are comparatively isolated. You need a car (rentals are available) to get to town, or take a hotel shuttle or expensive taxi. Otherwise guests are captive to their hotel restaurants.

Condo-hotel-timeshare rooms must first be divided into standard – some with kitchenettes – and all-inclusive. The latter have proliferated in recent years, saving the casual traveler and young families the need to hunt down and travel to restaurants, deal with the language and foreign currency, thus nicely overcoming the isolation drawback in the corridor hotels.

All-inclusive allows the traveler to eat and drink all they want without ever changing dollars into pesos, usually at three or four restaurants, most of them buffets. You pay for everything before leaving home, then wear a bracelet that identifies you as pre-paid. No wallet is needed, as you can charge other costs to your room.

It's a new freedom with few drawbacks, growing fast in popularity with those who don't care about the local culture or are timid about foreign travel or want maximum freedom and comfort. Incidentally, street crime in Cabo is virtually unknown; police are watching out for tourists. We feel safer walking the Cabo streets at night than in any sizeable U.S. city.

Hotel rooms are next subdivided into beach-seaside and inland-town, the latter being much cheaper. They are then further categorized on the basis of location and view, using the common industry terms: Beachside, Ocean View, Poolside and Garden (meaning no water in sight).

Timeshares are aggressively offered for sale even before you get out of the airport. Attending a seductive timeshare presentation takes half a day, not the hour they promise, but it often earns a free meal and cash or perks worth up to \$200.

If you must buy, get a floating (flexible) week, not a fixed (rigid) one. But beware that the uncapped stiff annual maintenance fee will keep going up until it's more than the place is worth and you're locked in to keep paying it.

For those who fall for Cabo and want to stay longer for less there are also condos for sale, as well as inland-gated gringo communities where a new home with a view to the ocean and Lands End can be purchased for under \$100,000. Incidentally the distinctive-prominent bare rocky spine leading to the arch and Lands End is made of the same light granite we know at Tahoe.

Cabo is highly popular with the more romantic expats and snowbirds, but for those who prefer what a city can offer, less glamorous, cheaper La Paz (population roughly 250,000, with a larger selection of cheaper gringo communities) lies only four hours by road to the north, with essentially the same climate and more amenities but no arch.

In between lies the artsy Pacific surfers village of Todos Santos. Cheap local buses make a circle day trip from Cabo around lovely scenic mountain ranges to see it all. So do more comfortable and expensive excursion buses and city tours leaving from Cabo hotels.

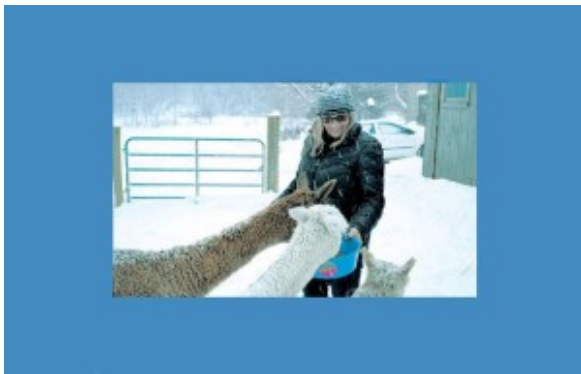
All things considered, Cabo is far from authentic old Mexico, but it's salubrious climate, warmth, charm and easy holiday seaside beauty, combined with its quick easy air access – our flight from Phoenix gets us there in time for a swim before lunch – makes it almost irresistible for an outdoor warm winter holiday.

Robert S. Wood and his wife spend half the year in Lake Tahoe and the other half in Sedona. He is the author of a dozen books, including the original trail guide to Desolation Wilderness.

Anderson's mom taking on new life as farmer

By Katy Savage, Vermont Standard

HARTLAND, Vt. – Inside Lauren Anderson's home, there is a picture of eight grown children hanging underneath the stairwell. Two of the children in the photograph made it to a national snowboarding championship, another was a top slopestyle competitor, another won gold in snowboard cross at the Winter X Games two years ago. Another – Jamie Anderson – is the top woman slopestyle competitor in the world and is set on competing for the Olympic team in Russia this winter.



Lauren Anderson went from Tahoe ski mom to Vermont alpaca farmer. Photo/ Katy Savage/Vermont Standard

Anderson's Hartland home is a long way from the Sierra-at-Tahoe Resort where she devoted her life to raising a team of professional skiers and snowboarders. Now, Anderson's devoted to the three alpacas in her farmhouse garage.

"My mom has always loved Vermont and she's been talking about

it my whole life,” Jamie said. “When she had the motivation to pick up and move and make the journey all the way across the country ... I was surprised, but I also 100 percent supported her to follow her heart and do what makes her happy.”

In September, Anderson drove across the country in her Mini Cooper that Jamie won in the U.S. Open the year before. She moved into a small farmhouse off Rice Road in Hartland to follow a new passion: alpaca farmer.

Read the whole story

Author to read at Sierra Nevada College

Award-winning author Colum McCann will give a reading Jan. 9 at 5pm at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village.

McCann is the author of six novels and two collections of short stories. His most recent novel, “Transatlantic”, was long-listed for the 2013 Man Booker Prize.

There will be reception at 4:30pm, with the talk from 5-6:30pm.

Nobel Peace prize winner to

Speak in Stateline

William Collins, an internationally recognized climate change scientist and a lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that was awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace prize, will be the keynote speaker at Operation Sierra Storm Meteorologist's Conference Jan. 8-10.

Other speakers during the three-day event include:

- Duane Waliser, chief scientist of the Earth Science and Technology Directorate at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.
- Virgil Welch, special counsel California Air Resources Board.
- Julie Regan, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency external affairs chief.
- Jeff Piotrowski, Emmy Award-winning storm chaser who has filmed more than 800 tornadoes in his 30 years

Collins and Welch's presentations are open to the public Jan. 10 at Harveys Lake Tahoe. Welch will speak from 7:45-8:45am and Collins from 9-10am, with Q&A to follow.

Tips to prevent a house fire

By Teri Mizuhara

Across the nation more than 236,000 house fires occur annually and they peak in January due to the winter weather.

Many of these fires are preventable.

Here are some key things you can do to reduce your chance of

becoming a statistic:

- The No. 1 cause of house fires (33 percent) are cooking fires, so to prevent this type of fire simply never leave food unattended. If you must leave your kitchen, either turn off the appliance that is cooking the food or take a timer or cooking implement with you to remind you of the cooking food. How you heat your home can put you at risk of a house fire.
- Fireplaces, chimneys and fireplace related heating equipment should be professionally maintained annually. Among other things, a professional should check that your stove pipes/chimneys and surrounding area are not deteriorating and becoming compromised to the point they can cause a fire.
- Do not overload your electrical outlets. Consider having a licensed electrician check and possibly upgrade your home's wiring since many house fires are traced back to electrical malfunctions, such as short circuits or arcing. According to a U.S. Fire Administration Topical Fire Report, older homes (35 years-plus) are at an increased risk of catching fire and "there are three major areas in older properties that contribute to compromised electrical systems: the effects of aging on the wiring itself, misuse and abuse of the electrical components, and non-code-compliant installations."
- Make sure you have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors properly installed and maintained in your home. Literally every second counts in a house fire, so make sure you have your "early warning" system in place and functioning in the event you have a fire. Always exit the building immediately and call 911 from outside the building. Never go back inside the house.

With the holidays behind us and 2014 ahead of us, this is a good time to focus on our personal safety. Preventing a fire might be hard to measure, but the results are priceless.

Teri Mizuhara works for the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire.

South Shore's first baby of 2014 born Jan. 2



Abraham and Adriana Tapia
with son Joshua.
Photo/Provided

Barton Memorial Hospital's first baby of 2014 is the son of a hospital employee.

Joshua Tapia-Hernandez was born Jan. 2 at 5:24pm. He weighed 6 pounds, 14 ounces and was 18-inches long.

Adriana and Abraham Tapia are well versed in the baby department. They arrived Thursday afternoon and within a few hours Joshua arrived. The couple has three other children – ages 11 months, 14 years and 16 years.

Abraham Tapia works for environmental services at the hospital.

To family received a basket of gifts from local businesses and employees valued at more than \$1,200.

This first baby of the New Year came sooner than the one in 2013 – she didn't arrive until Jan. 4.

Barton is seeing a decline in the number of births. In 2013, 289 babies were born at the hospital. This includes four sets of twins. This compares to two years ago when there were 400 births in 2011.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Hotel minibars may become extinct

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

Is it time to say goodbye to the hotel minibar?

A recent survey by the travel website TripAdvisor.com found that the hotel minibar was the least important amenity for U.S. travelers. Only 21 percent of travelers ranked the minibar as an important amenity, compared to 89 percent who called free in-room wireless Internet the most important.

There is little financial reason to keep minibars. Hotel consulting firms estimate that minibars generate no more than 0.24 percent of total hotel revenue, with much of that eaten up by the cost to check and restock the bars.

Read the whole story

How women can generate income for life

By Nanci Hellmich, USA Today

Many women have a “quiet fear” that they won’t have enough money for retirement, but they can take several steps to make sure that doesn’t happen.

“The key is to continue earning throughout retirement and to find ways to create income for life,” says Donna Phelan, 62, who has worked with thousands of women nationwide during her 18 years with several large Wall Street investment firms. She has an MBA in finance and is the author of a new book, *Women, Money & Prosperity: A Sister’s Perspective on How to Retire Well*.

Research shows that women often have far less saved for retirement than men, Phelan says. They frequently earn less than men and often take time out of their careers to rear children. They also spend more time with elder care. Some women don’t start thinking about their retirement savings until late in life, and by then it’s hard to save enough, she says.

Read the whole story

Family tries to find good after '12 SnowGlobe tragedy

By Janelle Wetzstein, Argus-Courier

No parent wants to admit their child is using drugs. No parent wants to accept that drugs contributed to their child's death. And no parent wants to think that if only their child stuck with a friend, they might still be alive.

But in the past year, Petaluma's Kevin and Kim Byrne endured all three tragic scenarios.



There was a candlelight vigil in South Lake Tahoe for Alyssa Byrne last January. Photo/LTN file

"Sometimes I think we're still dealing with it as if it happened yesterday," Kevin Byrne said Monday afternoon. "We're getting by, one day at a time, but it's difficult."

It's been a year since Kevin Byrne said goodbye to his 19-year-old daughter Alyssa as she headed off to the annual SnowGlobe music festival in South Lake Tahoe. Hours after ringing in the New Year and the end of the concert, Alyssa was nowhere to be found.

Her body was discovered days later in a nearby snow bank. An

autopsy found she likely died of hypothermia, and a toxicology report revealed she had large amounts of methamphetamine and psychoactive drugs in her system. Her drug use, coupled with the location of her body, caused authorities to speculate that Alyssa Byrne tried to walk to her hotel to avoid the long lines at the shuttle bus after the concert concluded, and then became disoriented in the freezing temperatures.

While many parents would break down after such loss, the Byrnes instead spent the past year helping young adults fight substance abuse and reminding young people of how important a buddy can be when partying.

“At least a dozen kids have reached out to me since Alyssa died,” said Kevin Byrne. “They’ve asked for help with serious substance abuse problems. I’ve sat through many Narcotics Anonymous meetings with them. It’s incredible that this tragic circumstance has helped other people.”

Read the whole story