



- Learn
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Everything We Do Influences Behavior

The first sentence I ask participants in my Effective Communication workshop to write down is: “Start all your meetings exactly on time.”

That may seem like an odd beginning for a class in communication. But here’s my point:

When you start your meetings late, you’re sending a message to the people who are present: “Your time isn’t as important as the time of the people who are late.”

Raise your hand if you’ve ever arrived on time for a meeting, only to have the meeting’s leader wait several minutes, then ask, “Where is everybody?” (I see your hands up.) “What am I, chopped liver?” you ask.

Or perhaps you’ve heard, “Where’s Jim? Someone call Jim and tell him we’re all here waiting for him.” Argggghh.

Where does this leader behavior lead other people?

It leads me to know that I can get a few more things done before I trek down to the meeting room of this late-starting leader.

So I might become part of the problem, creating a snowball effect with other attendees who are making the same decision. Pretty soon, it’s fifteen minutes past the appointed meeting time, and everyone’s late, knowing that the meeting hasn’t started yet.

Asking on-time attendees to wait says, “Your time isn’t valuable.” It says to late attendees, “Take your time, we’ll wait.”

You’ve influenced behavior by accident, in the wrong direction.

So we’re back to the beginning: start all your meetings exactly on time, even if you have only *one attendee* in the room. Latecomers, when they see the meeting in progress, will get the message quickly.

Many will even change their behavior and show up on time. Imagine that.

