

Career Path: If You Scheduled Your Day Like an Airline

Career Development



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Well, that didn't take long. No sooner are we back to business travel than the airlines remind us why flying is so maddening. To illustrate, let's assume your boss has started scheduling meetings the way airlines schedule their flights. How would that look?

> Boss's Assistant: "Oh hi, Peony. I'm calling about your request for a meeting with Gorgon."
>
> You: "Great, thank you, Agonia! We have a big decision coming up, and I need Gorgon's input. How does next week look?"
>
> "Ha, ha, ha! You're so cute. Let's see, I have some availability in three months' time."
>
> "What, really? I need only a few minutes of Gorgon's time. Isn't there an earlier time available?"
>
> Heavy sigh. "Well, there is a slot in two weeks, but … ."
>
> "I'll take it. I really need to talk with Gorgon."
>
> "I'll send you an invite. Bye Peony."

A few days before the meeting

“Hello Agonia. I’m calling about the meeting invite you sent for the 10th.”

“Yes. Do you have the meeting reference number?”

“What? Er, it’s the meeting with Gorgon starting at 3 pm on the 10th.”

“I need the reference number. We categorize Gorgon’s meetings by reference number. It’s clearly listed in your meeting reservation.”

“Oh, that’s new, hold on, let me look ... Agonia?” Calling back “Hi there, Agonia. We got disconnected somehow.”

“What can I do for you Peony?”

“I found the meeting number. It’s C&xD*çRiuP.”

“Sorry, I don’t have any meeting scheduled with that number.”

You, repeating number: “Wait, is that a cedilla?”

“I have it. What can I help you with?”

“Well, I’m a little confused. It says here my meeting lasts for two hours. I only need 20 or 30 minutes at most.”

“Gorgon is keen on making efficient use of employees’ time. The last thing he wants is for you to be late for your next meeting. Best to stick with this schedule, because then you can be sure to finish on time.”



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“I guess so, but I’m not sure how that makes efficient use of my time. Anyway, never mind that. The meeting invite says I should come to Gorgon’s office at 1 pm already. That’s two hours before the meeting starts!”

“Yes, and be happy you’re not visiting from one of the international offices. International employees have to come three hours before their meeting is scheduled to start.”

“But why?!”

“Well, we also want to make efficient use of Gorgon’s time. Once an employee came five minutes late to a meeting, and it threw off Gorgon’s schedule for the whole morning. We never wanted that to happen again, so now we require employees to come two hours early to make sure the meeting will start on time.”

Muttering under your breath. “What’s this about checking my meeting readiness the day before the meeting?”

“Gorgon just wants to make sure you’re ready for the meeting. It helps if you send everything in advance, including your slides, the project charter, the names of the other executives involved, and the meeting minutes.”

“But I don’t have any of that! I just need to talk with Gorgon for a few minutes to get some input. He knows what this is about.”

“If you’d like, I can reschedule the meeting for a later time when you’ll be ready … ?”

“No, no! I guess I can send something in advance. Let’s just leave it.”

The day of the meeting

Arriving on the executive floor, you see a line of faces standing in the hallway outside Gorgon’s office. You recognize two colleagues.

“Sade, Maddie! What are you doing here in the hallway?”

Maddie: “Waiting for our meeting with Gorgon. Mine was scheduled for noon, but he’s running behind again.”

Sade: “Ours was yesterday afternoon, but that got cancelled. Technical problems or something.”

Recalling that you saw Gorgon leaving at 3 pm yesterday with golf clubs, you say: “Oh, sorry to hear that. Who are all these other people? And why are you all in the hallway?”

Maddie: “Agonia only lets us in at the time our meeting starts. We used to be able to wait in her office, but once someone talked too loudly on their cell phone, so now we only get to go in once our meeting is called.”

“Gosh, it’s not so comfortable out here. I’ll just sit on the floor over here and try to get some work done.”

Two hours later

“Peony? Time for your meeting.”

You, getting to your feet and whispering to yourself, “Finally!”

“Come on in. We pride ourselves in making sure Gorgon’s meetings start on time. Take a seat along this wall. We put in an extension cord so you can charge your laptop while you wait. Not sure it’s working after someone spilled water on it, but it’s the thought that counts, right?”

You, noticing that most of the people who were waiting in the hallway are now waiting in Agonia’s office. “Agonia, I thought my meeting was starting.”

“Your meeting did start, dear. It’s just that you won’t see Gorgon for a little while yet because of congestion from earlier meetings. I’ll give you an update on the schedule as soon as I know more.”

You, thinking to yourself, “I’m so glad I brought my power bank today.”

Two further hours go by. It is now a little after 5 pm.



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“Peony, Gorgon will see you now, quickly, hurry.”

You, grabbing your things and rushing into Gorgon’s office. “Gorgon, hi. I’ll keep this brief. I put everything you asked for in the slides and summary memo. I recommend we go with Option A, although Option B would cost us 10 percent less.”

Gorgon, looking blank. “I don’t think I saw your summary. Maybe you can send it by email, and also drop off a hard copy with Agonia. I’ve been really busy.”

You, looking at Gorgon’s spotless desk and empty office, are at a loss for words.

“Anyway, I’m running a bit behind today, so if there’s nothing else … .”

Agonia enters. “Come along Peony. Look at that will you, we started on time and finished on time, as promised! We are keeping up our perfect track record.”

You, unable to help yourself, “Agonia, I got here two hours early, waited in your office for two more hours, and now we finished 15 minutes late. How is that on time?”

“Well Gorgon is so busy, we agreed with the CEO that any meeting that starts and ends

within 15 minutes of its scheduled time will count as an on-time meeting. Isn’t that wonderful!”

“What? Wait, why are we going out this back door to the fire escape? I left my coat in your office.”

“Oh, just come by again tomorrow to pick it up. We found that it was confusing to have people coming and going from the same door, so now we have departing attendees leave this way.”

“But security only lets people onto the executive floor if they have a scheduled meeting! I need my coat.”

“Your meeting invite did say to keep your belongings with you at all times, Peony. But don’t worry, schedule another meeting and I’m sure everything will be fine.”

People can get used to almost anything, if it is presented in small steps. It is only looking back at the cumulative effect of many small changes that we realize how far we’ve come.

We often don’t realize how many aspects of our lives are affected by this. Prices raised a few percent at a time, the amount included in a package shrunk ever so slightly, online terms that are just a bit less favorable with each revision.

> If you let your aim point downwards, even a little bit, don’t be surprised if you end up in places you don’t want to be.

This is the flipside of continuous improvement, where small positive changes made steadily over time lead to impressive results. Let’s call it dissolution by degree. If you let your aim point downwards, even a little bit, don’t be surprised if you end up in places you don’t want to be.

Pay attention to what you accept in your performance. It may be too late for airlines, but it’s not too late for us in managing our careers.

Be well.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

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