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## Food for thought on meetings

C. Douglas Phillips, MD, FACR

*"People who enjoy meetings should not be in charge of anything."*

—Thomas Sowell

**T**om had something there. It is clear that he didn't work for a major U.S. hospital or hospital system. Or for a bunch of doctors. We have our meetings. We **LOVE** our meetings. That's why we all work so hard to miss them.

I've been thinking about committee meetings a lot lately. I've been to a few, have a few more planned, and have mixed feelings about them. There is a great feeling going to a committee meeting and having an agenda, moving through it, getting something accomplished and moving on with your day.

However, that isn't usually what happens. You go, against your better judgement. Then, it's off to the races and everyone is talking and no one is listening and the clock is moving and then the time is over and you're upset and everyone else is upset and nothing got decided. Maybe you all agree to use e-mail to work through the issue. **Ha!**

Because we all know that e-mail is the best way to make sure that the people who need to know don't open the message and that someone copies everyone else on something that wasn't meant for more than a few people. Next

thing you know, you're back in the meeting room, yelling even louder.

I have seen one item common to all successful meetings. I'd like to share it with you. Perhaps, you'll take my advice and use it next time.

### **Food.**

Food gets everyone in the room. Food (particularly **good** food) keeps something in many people's mouths so they **CAN'T** interrupt others. Food (ditto the prior remark — **good** food) makes people happy so they are more agreeable to that shift change or new protocol that looks heinous and unacceptable. Food is the great equalizer. I think it harkens back to medical school, when we looked for meetings with free food, regardless of the topic.

I've noticed that meetings with food end up with more contented participants regardless of outcome. You want to throw a meeting, have a good turnout and get something done? Let everyone know there is going to be food. If you want to ensure your intent for the meeting is accomplished quickly, tell everyone that you don't have the budget for another meeting with food and that you'd like to get it done this time. When the food ends, the moods may change, so it is a bit of a balancing act—food for the discussion that runs out when the voting is through. You can do it.

Mahalo.

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