

The Surprising Science of Meetings:

SMA Member Steven Rogelberg Explains How to Lead Your Team to Peak Performance

By Stephany Below, PR Specialist

Many of your colleagues and bosses despise them. Your calendar is probably filled with them, nonetheless. And no matter how much time you spend participating in them, they never seem to get any more productive or enjoyable.

For most leaders and employees, meetings are a necessary evil. At their best, they offer a chance for teams to make important decisions and learn from one another. At their worst, they are huge time drains that leave people feeling their day was wasted in the most unproductive way. And yet, poor meetings persist.

Southern Management Association member **Steven G. Rogelberg** is trying to change that. In his new book, ***The Surprising Science of Meetings: How You Can Lead Your Team to Peak Performance*** (Oxford University Press, 2019), Rogelberg synthesizes the latest research from management and behavioral science into a how-to guide that offers sound advice and simple changes meeting leaders can implement into the workplace today.

The book is already gaining notice. The Washington Post recently named it one of [10 leadership books to watch for in 2019](#) and Business Insider named it one of [14 business books everyone will be reading in 2019](#). Several influential business leaders have given it positive reviews as well.

"In workplaces around the world, meetings are where productivity and creativity go to die," said Adam Grant, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Give and Take*, *Originals*, and *Option B* with Sheryl Sandberg. "Steven Rogelberg is the world's leading expert on how to fix them, and here he shares the best evidence on how we can stop wasting time and falling victim to groupthink."

In the opening chapter of his book, published this month, Rogelberg explains just how much poor meetings cost in time and money. American employees collectively attend 55 million meetings a day, notes Rogelberg, Chancellor's Professor at University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and a researcher and consultant to some of the world's most successful companies. It is estimated that the annual cost of those meetings, when weighted with the average salary data of attendees, is a staggering \$1.4 trillion.

Yet, all those meetings don't appear to be accomplishing much. "Too many meetings" was cited as the #1 time waster at the office by 47% of employees, according to a recent study of more than 3,000 employees by Salary.com. This translates to a potential waste of more than \$250 billion a year by having too many bad meetings, Rogelberg notes.

"Meetings done wrong waste time, waste energy, derail teams and leaders, have tremendous dollar costs, and lead to employee disengagement and dissatisfaction with their jobs," he explained."

On the other hand, they *can* be productive. In his book, Rogelberg details science-based practices and techniques for counteracting the most frequent pitfalls—meetings that fail to engage, those that inadvertently encourage participants to tune out, and those that blatantly disregard participants' time—and offers practical advice for turning meetings into productive uses of time.

“Meetings done right promote inclusion, engagement, innovation, teamwork, and collective success,” he explained. “They can become welcome events, rather than dreaded time sucks.”

A quick read, peppered with key research findings, and best practices, *The Surprising Science of Meetings* goes way beyond conventional wisdom you often hear, like have an agenda. With catchy chapter titles, including “No More Talking!” and “The Bigger, The Badder,” Rogelberg makes a case that simple changes based on sound science can have a big impact.

One such bit of advice involves how the leader approaches the meeting agenda. While most meetings begin with general announcements and updates—oftentimes leaving actionable items to the end, or forgotten altogether—he suggests flipping that structure and starting the meeting with the most strategic, critical issue that requires discussion and not just listening.

The most important thing for a meeting leader to remember when conducting a meeting is the importance of the leader embracing their role as a steward of others' time, he explained.

“With a steward mindset, the leader is much more likely to design and execute a meeting experience that truly works,” he said. “A meeting experience that yields strong individual and collective outcomes.”

Such advice includes making meetings about 5 to 10 percent shorter in length than your initial estimate and using a “silent reading” period for workers to consider a new proposal and then have a discussion rather than listen to a long presentation.

The book also offers a practical toolkit at the end that includes resources such as meeting assessments, checklists, and a meeting agenda template.

The advice in *The Surprising Science of Meetings* is powerful, but surprisingly straightforward and simple to try. The book is the culmination of 15 years of meetings research by Rogelberg including survey interviews with more than 5,000 employees across a range of industries and around the globe.

Other simple, actionable solutions include only meeting when a team absolutely needs to meet and inviting less people. For the latter, Rogelberg suggests inviting only the core members of the group or project to each particular meeting and then simply updating the

variety of others who at times may need to attend but do not always need to attend, by including them in the emailed agendas and notes.

What makes this book unique, Rogelberg explained, is its grounding in 50 years of teams and meetings science.

“It is an evidence-based book designed to help bridge our science with practice,” he added, “to truly move the dial on meetings by leveraging our science.”

The book also offers insights leaders might not have ever considered. For example, there *are* some people who generally enjoy meetings. Rogelberg’s research shows that goal-oriented people are more likely to feel negatively about meetings, whereas less goal-oriented employees are likely to actually feel better about their jobs after a meeting.

And, as with most things in life and meetings, snacks always help.

[Find more information about Rogelberg and *The Surprising Science of Meetings* here.](#)

Steven G. Rogelberg is Chancellor's Professor at University of North Carolina, Charlotte, for distinguished national, international, and interdisciplinary contributions. He has well over 100 publications and recently won the highly prestigious Humboldt Award for his research on meeting science. His work has been profiled in the *Harvard Business Review*, *CBS News*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *NPR*, *Guardian*, *National Geographic*, and *Scientific American Mind*, among others. In addition to his research and teaching, he consults for small and large organizations, including IBM, TIAA, Procter & Gamble, VF Corporation, Family Dollar, Siemens, and others. Dr. Rogelberg founded and currently directs large outreach initiatives focusing on nonprofit organization health and effectiveness with over 500 nonprofits served.