

Hell Freezes Over - Corporate Meetings To Blame

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What's the most commonly-heard question at a corporate event?

Try: "Why is it always so COLD at these things?"

You'd think a question asked that often would have yielded an answer by now. It hasn't - at least, not a satisfactory one.

Instead, the stock answer is usually something to this effect: "It keeps the attendees from nodding off."

Another timeless rationale, handed down at the tribal campfire from one generation to the next. And a tell-tale symptom of The Peter Principle:

"Because this is how we've *always* done it."

The perpetuation of the unfounded. Hence traditions like herding clients into rooms made cryogenically unbearable...in the name of attentiveness.

Does science back it up?

No.

Taxpayers can rejoice in the dearth of studies of cognition in the limited range of temperatures under discussion - say, 50 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Studies abound, though, of motor skill performance in temperature extremes. (For the adventurous, a litany of recent ones can be found at <http://clearinghouse.missouriwestern.edu/manuscripts/589.php>)

One thing's for sure: medical literature doesn't enthusiastically endorse frigid conditions for attendees to absorb and retain information.

Yet it's the standard, and while the practice may be unreasoned, it's more than just that. It's insulting.

How so?

Because it assumes

- the presentation is so bad that it can't hold anyone's attention
- and, conversely, that the audience - usually, the client's own employees - are such layabouts that they'll doze right off.

Don't think the condescension isn't perceived, whether overtly or implicitly.

For a glimpse at just how *deeply resented* the tactic is, see this outstanding article by USA Today's Elizabeth Weise:

http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2008-08-06-overchilling-conference-rooms_N.htm

Granted, attendees of corporate meetings are, collectively, a captive audience. Their presence (and presence of mind) is expected.

They are also guests. As such, their dignity is commensurate with that of a guest in one's own home.

And their time spent onsite is no license for misuse.

