

*Note: This series is intended to present a common experience where the outcome was not satisfactory and could have been predicted with more forethought. The purpose is that the reader or group of readers thinks through the situation and comes up with his own “First Clues” so that a more positive result could be achieved in the future. In this instance, clues are offered as a way of prompting thought and discussion.*

## **The First Clue Was...**

### *The Case of the No-good, Horrible, Very Bad Meeting*

**Situation:** You have been asked to participate in a strategy review for your division. The meeting is scheduled from 8:30 to 5:30 and lunch will be brought in. The Division VP, his 3 general managers, and 9 directors have all been asked to attend. In addition, managers from Finance, IT, and HR will be present. Prior to the meeting, presentations were sent to attendees to review, covering the strategies. An agenda was also sent that listed 3 back-to-back 1-hour presentations by each general manager followed by 1 hour of questions and answers. In the afternoon 2 hours is designated for working groups, to digest what the strategy means for each business unit. The last two hours of the day is to be spent with each group giving a presentation about the application of the strategy to its unit.

**Experience:** The day is long, and the strategies feel very internally focused. The word “customer” is infrequently mentioned in the discussion. At various points, decorum breaks down as people start having side conversations and lose focus. Instead of consensus, the end of the day is marked by confusion, fatigue and disappointment. What went wrong and what could have been predicted to go wrong? What would you do differently next time?

### **What went wrong:**

- No common agreement
- A morale downer vs. motivator
- Lost a whole day of work with email and voicemail mounting to no discernable benefit.
- Senior management does not get vote of confidence that is sought.

### **And the clues were...**

- Not interactive from the start with three 1-hour presentations starting the day? Allows passive behavior from the start?
- Bad ratio of presentation / group participation. Only 1 hour of discussion at the very end of morning.
- The three presentations do not support each other with different views and priorities?
- Sixteen people are too many to hold a productive meeting?
- Venue / Schedule? A whole day in the same room, minus the bath room breaks may be too long for most attendees?