

PRODUCTIVITY

RUNNING PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS HANDOUT

The topic of meetings is an important one. Boring meetings and unproductive meetings are among the biggest complaints that employees, and especially managers make. A significant amount of research has been done in recent years on the impact and cost of ineffective meetings.

We can highlight just a few key points coming out of this research.

Executives average about 23 hours a week in meetings or about 40%–50% of their total working hours.

About 33%, one third, of all time in meetings is considered inefficient or a waste of time. This means that for most of us we waste about 8 hours a week in meetings.

Approximately 25% of the time in meetings is spent on irrelevant issues.

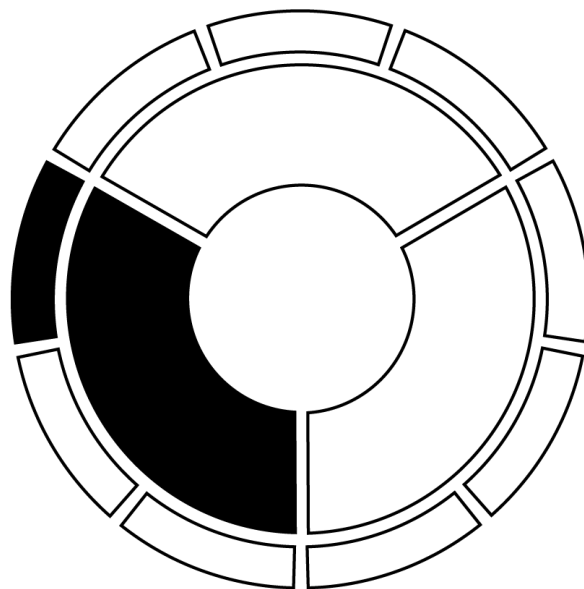
Seventy-three percent (73%) of people attending meetings don't pay attention and instead do other work unrelated to the meeting they are in.

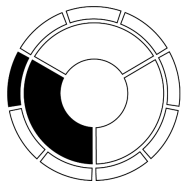
About 50% of people describe the meetings they attend at work to be unproductive overall.

One of the most common complaints heard by managers is that so much time is spent in meetings that little time remains to “get their work done”.

Clearly, in most companies, meetings are not run that well and there is much room for improvement. To begin to put all of this into perspective, let's revisit a central question, “What do managers do?”.

Managers are responsible for supporting and guiding people and processes to achieve specific monthly and quarterly outcomes for their team or department.





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Clearly, while individual contributors do need to attend some meetings to coordinate their work with others, much or most of their work is likely to be done solo.

But managers are not individual contributors.

Much of the work of a manager is to coordinate, support, and guide the work of others. So it makes sense that 40%–50% of a manager's time is spent in meetings.

Meetings themselves are not the problem. What we do in those meetings is the problem. A good place to start is to shift your mindset about meetings.

To shift mindsets let's explore a few more basic inquiries.

To begin, what are meetings, really?

Meeting is the word we use for communication in real-time with two or more people.

This real-time communication is usually on the phone, on a video conference bridge, or physically in the same room.

Why do we have meetings?

Why don't we just manage by email or text messaging?

Clearly, asynchronous communication such as email, messaging and leaving voice messages for one-another can be useful but these forms of communication lack many of the benefits of real-time communication.

We attend, create and manage meetings to engage each other in real-time communication. In short, we meet to connect.

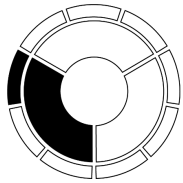
We meet to attend to emotional contexts. Meetings better enable us to both receive other people's feelings as well as to share our own.

Meetings can enhance teamwork and trust. And they provide the space for dialogue and collaboration with peers.

Meetings provide ideal spaces for solving problems, making decisions, as well as coming up with innovative approaches to complex situations.

Clearly meetings aren't going away.





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The common mindset that sees meetings as a necessary evil that are inherently boring and ineffective must be set aside if we're going to be successful in running more powerful and effective meetings.

Meetings are spaces filled with tremendous potential, mostly untapped potential. Your meetings can be thought of as opportunities to support and guide the people you work with. This means meetings are the places where you allow people to bring forward new abilities. And, meetings can become one of the locations where your teams' most exciting and enjoyable work is engaged.

Meetings provide times to connect with your friends and co-workers while cultivating greater meaning around work you and your teams are engaging.

As a leader, you are expected to make your meetings into concentrated spaces where new levels of success are established, nurtured and pursued.

While meetings can provide some of our best experiences at work there is a lot of work to do. Some of it is demanding and some can be boring, repetitive or unpleasant.

Meetings provide a time and space to invest into your work relationships. They are your best opportunities to unlock potential and put new action into motion.

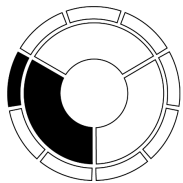
When meetings get caught in strained relationships, ineffective reporting, or one person's soapbox for telling everyone what is happening, engagement plummets, job satisfaction drops, and opportunities to advance our best work is lost.

Done well, meetings can make all of the work go more smoothly, with less difficulty and stress. We invite you to think of meetings as a conduit and container where work can progress successfully.

When you gather with your team using the right strategic planning and project management tools, coupled with your growing communication and accountability skills, meetings can be a place to make progress, celebrate wins, identify and remove obstacles to good work all while building more meaningful and capable relationships.

As a manager, when you elevate the effectiveness of your meetings, you can exponentially increase your value to the organization.





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Meetings are your opportunity to practice all of the skills you are learning in this training. This is also an opportunity to mentor others, share tools, and offer the support and guidance you need to give to your team.

In short, meetings represent the playing field on which your skills really shine. Think of meetings as the place where you do your best work as a manager.

The following guidelines and best practices will help you and your team run more effective meetings consistently.

To drive all these points home using your own experience and considering your own meeting preferences, let's consider two different kinds of meetings.

First, consider a scenario where you attend a lot of loosely run meeting that don't start on time, that don't end on time (and often make you late for other meetings), that continuously veers off-topic, where there is a lot of confusion, where people aren't bringing their full attention to the meeting, multitasking and missing key information, and people aren't held accountable to who is going to do what going forward.

Now consider a different kind of meeting.

In this scenario, most of the meetings you attend every week have an agenda, start and end on time, are run efficiently in a way that uses the time well and sends the message that everyone's time and contribution is respected. In this scenario, the important topics are discussed, people can get the help they need, people are held accountable to the actions they commit to, information is presented in a way that is clear and easy to understand, and work progresses smoothly.

Which of these two types of meetings would you rather attend?

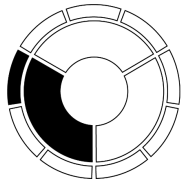
Which manager's meeting (scenario #1 or #2) would you respect more?

Which team (scenario #1 or #2) would you expect to achieve higher performance?

Which type of meeting do you tend to run? Scenario #1 or #2?

While most organizations have meetings that fall somewhere between these two, you can always learn how to lead tighter, more effective meetings. The following guidelines will help. All meetings should be evaluated in terms of these guidelines as effective best practices.





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Productive Meeting Guidelines

The following guidelines will help you make sure that you are consistently running effective and productive meetings.

1. Don't meet unnecessarily. Cancel or modify inefficient meetings.

Ask yourself: "Is this meeting really necessary?" Can we accomplish the same objectives through email updates, project management software or dashboards? Use regularly occurring rhythm meetings for the problem solving, decision making and collaboration (not for updates).

2. Optimize recurring meeting rhythm (weekly, biweekly, monthly).

At times, ad hoc meetings are necessary. However, the most effective managers strive to have 90% of internal meetings on a regular recurring rhythm. These rhythm meetings are in the context of the other 1 on 1 and other recurring meetings, as well as asynchronous communication including dashboards, project plans, project management software, email and Slack. They should be value add, should recur on the same day and time each week (or biweekly or monthly), and include a consistent group of attendees (the right people).

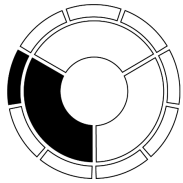
3. Respect people's time. Always have an agenda and always start and end on time.

Communicate the purpose and objectives of the meeting in advance and ensure attendees understand what preparation is expected and have plenty of time to prepare for the meeting. Always a written agenda. Keep the meeting on track and drive to results.

4. Optimize meeting length and try not to schedule meetings back to back.

Schedule 30 minute meetings or 50-minute meetings within a 60-minute time block. Start and end on time. Ending at 50 minutes allows people time for restroom breaks and timely transitions to the next hour of meetings. There needs to be a minimum of 10 minutes between meetings and 15 minutes or 30 is much better. This way if a meeting runs over it doesn't sabotage the following meeting. During these breaks, people can also take bio breaks or check messages and have time to gather their thoughts and switch gears for the next meeting.





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5. Establish and always follow agreed-upon “Ground Rules.”

Ground rules are basic, agreed-upon guidelines that help attendees orient to meeting intentions, expectations, communication practices and boundaries. Examples of ground rules: Phones off and laptops down, full undivided attention (no multitasking), and everyone participates, OK to call a timeout, try not to interrupt, share visuals or supporting material on screen to support verbal explanations of complex topics, etc.

6. Start every meeting with a very brief “check-in”.

A check-in is where each person briefly (30 seconds to 1 minute) shares how they are doing and a little bit about their current context. For example, people can share if they are not feeling well, distracted or stressed. Empathizing with others can positively impact the dynamic and improve the productivity of the meeting. No status updates, feedback or requests should be included in the check in. It's mainly about how you are feeling and doing.

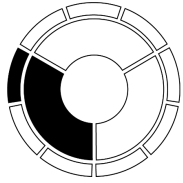
7. Document decisions made, action items, agreements and commitments

Capture and date key decisions for ongoing reference to minimize future confusion and/or conflict. Ensure accountability by documenting action items, target dates and commitments. Make sure to assign all tasks on your project plan task lists or in your project management software to the person who has accepted that assignment, task or made the commitment.

8. Capture open loops and parking lot items.

Keep a running list of open loops, these are issues that need to be resolved before the current meeting ends. Be intentional about which items are discussed and which are delayed until that section on the agenda. Parking lot items are topics that are going to be “parked” until a future meeting. These items can be added to the agenda for a next meeting.





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Conclusion

As a Titan leader, you set the tone for how the time is used in meetings at our company. You have a responsibility to be intentional about the quality and productivity of your meetings. You are expected to learn and understand these guidelines and to implement them immediately. You are also expected to bring your feedback and your ideas about how all of your meetings can continually improve over time.

Please study the handouts and complete the worksheets accompanying this lesson. Most of all, you must implement these new techniques into your workflow and build habits around these techniques to see their true value. We look forward to seeing you at the upcoming live workshop.

