Picture this:

It's Monday morning,

you're at the office,

you're settling in for the day at work,

and this guy that you sort of recognize from down the hall,

walks right into your cubicle

and he steals your chair.

Doesn't say a word —

just rolls away with it.

Doesn't give you any information about why he took your chair

out of all the other chairs that are out there.

Doesn't acknowledge the fact that you might need your chair

to get some work done today.

You wouldn't stand for it. You'd make a stink.

You'd follow that guy back to his cubicle

and you'd say, "Why my chair?"

Okay, so now it's Tuesday morning and you're at the office,

and a meeting invitation pops up in your calendar.

(Laughter)

And it's from this woman who you kind of know from down the hall,

and the subject line references some project that you heard a little bit about.

But there's no agenda.

There's no information about why you were invited to the meeting.

And yet you accept the meeting invitation, and you go.

And when this highly unproductive session is over,

you go back to your desk,

and you stand at your desk and you say,

"Boy, I wish I had those two hours back,

like I wish I had my chair back."

(Laughter)

Every day, we allow our coworkers,

who are otherwise very, very nice people,

to steal from us.

And I'm talking about something far more valuable than office furniture.

I'm talking about time. Your time.

In fact, I believe that

we are in the middle of a global epidemic

of a terrible new illness known as MAS:

Mindless Accept Syndrome.

(Laughter)

The primary symptom of Mindless Accept Syndrome

is just accepting a meeting invitation the minute it pops up in your calendar.

(Laughter)

It's an involuntary reflex — ding, click, bing — it's in your calendar,

"Gotta go, I'm already late for a meeting." (Laughter)

Meetings are important, right?

And collaboration is key to the success of any enterprise.

And a well-run meeting can yield really positive, actionable results.

But between globalization

and pervasive information technology,

the way that we work

has really changed dramatically over the last few years.

And we're miserable. (Laughter)

And we're miserable not because the other guy can't run a good meeting,

it's because of MAS, our Mindless Accept Syndrome,

which is a self-inflicted wound.

Actually, I have evidence to prove that MAS is a global epidemic.

Let me tell you why.

A couple of years ago, I put a video on Youtube, and in the video,

I acted out every terrible conference call you've ever been on.

It goes on for about five minutes,

and it has all the things that we hate about really bad meetings.

There's the moderator who has no idea how to run the meeting.

There are the participants who have no idea why they're there.

The whole thing kind of collapses into this collaborative train wreck.

And everybody leaves very angry.

It's kind of funny.

(Laughter)

Let's take a quick look.

(Video) Our goal today is to come to an agreement on a very important proposal.

As a group, we need to decide if —

bloop bloop —

Hi, who just joined?

Hi, it's Joe. I'm working from home today.

(Laughter)

Hi, Joe. Thanks for joining us today, great.

I was just saying, we have a lot of people on the call we'd like to get through,

so let's skip the roll call

and I'm gonna dive right in.

Our goal today is to come to an agreement on a very important proposal.

As a group, we need to decide if —

bloop bloop —

(Laughter)

Hi, who just joined?

No? I thought I heard a beep. (Laughter)

Sound familiar?

Yeah, it sounds familiar to me, too.

A couple of weeks after I put that online,

500,000 people in dozens of countries,

I mean dozens of countries,

watched this video.

And three years later, it's still getting thousands of views every month.

It's close to about a million right now.

And in fact, some of the biggest companies in the world,

companies that you've heard of but I won't name,

have asked for my permission to use this video in their new-hire training

to teach their new employees how not to run a meeting at their company.

And if the numbers —

there are a million views and it's being used by all these companies —

aren't enough proof that we have a global problem with meetings,

there are the many, many thousands

of comments posted online

after the video went up.

Thousands of people wrote things like,

"OMG, that was my day today!"

"That was my day every day!"

"This is my life."

One guy wrote,

"It's funny because it's true.

Eerily, sadly, depressingly true.

It made me laugh until I cried.

And cried. And I cried some more."

(Laughter)

This poor guy said,

"My daily life until retirement or death, sigh."

These are real quotes

and it's real sad.

A common theme running through all of these comments online

is this fundamental belief that we are powerless

to do anything other than go to meetings

and suffer through these poorly run meetings

and live to meet another day.

But the truth is, we're not powerless at all.

In fact, the cure for MAS is right here in our hands.

It's right at our fingertips, literally.

It's something that I call ¡No MAS!

(Laughter)

Which, if I remember my high school Spanish,

means something like, "Enough already, make it stop!"

Here's how No MAS works. It's very simple.

First of all, the next time you get a meeting invitation

that doesn't have a lot of information in it at all,

click the tentative button!

It's okay, you're allowed, that's why it's there.

It's right next to the accept button.

Or the maybe button, or whatever button is there for you not to accept immediately.

Then, get in touch with the person who asked you to the meeting.

Tell them you're very excited to support their work,

ask them what the goal of the meeting is,

and tell them you're interested in learning how you can help them achieve their goal.

And if we do this often enough,

and we do it respectfully,

people might start to be a little bit more thoughtful

about the way they put together meeting invitations.

And you can make more thoughtful decisions about accepting it.

People might actually start sending out agendas. Imagine!

Or they might not have a conference call with 12 people to talk about a status

when they could just do a quick email and get it done with.

People just might start to change their behavior because you changed yours.

And they just might bring your chair back, too. (Laughter)

No MAS!

Thank you.