

Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings



Robert Herbig
AI Practice Lead



Agenda

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- A not-so-brief history of meetings

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- Why don't we have enough meetings?

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- Can we invite more people to our meetings?

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- Techniques to make meetings last longer

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- A not-so-brief history of meetings
- Why don't we have enough meetings?
- Can we invite more people to our meetings?
- Techniques to make meetings last longer
- How to schedule meetings at 4:30pm

Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings



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Meetings

Type

- 1-1s
- Daily standup/scrum
- Agile Retrospective
- Increment planning
- Demo
- Off-site/strategic
- Workshop
- Decision-making
- Team building/social
- Brainstorming
- Career/performance review

Meetings

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Duration

- Short (15-30m)
- Typical (60m)
- Long (60m-4h)
- Multi-day

Meetings

Type

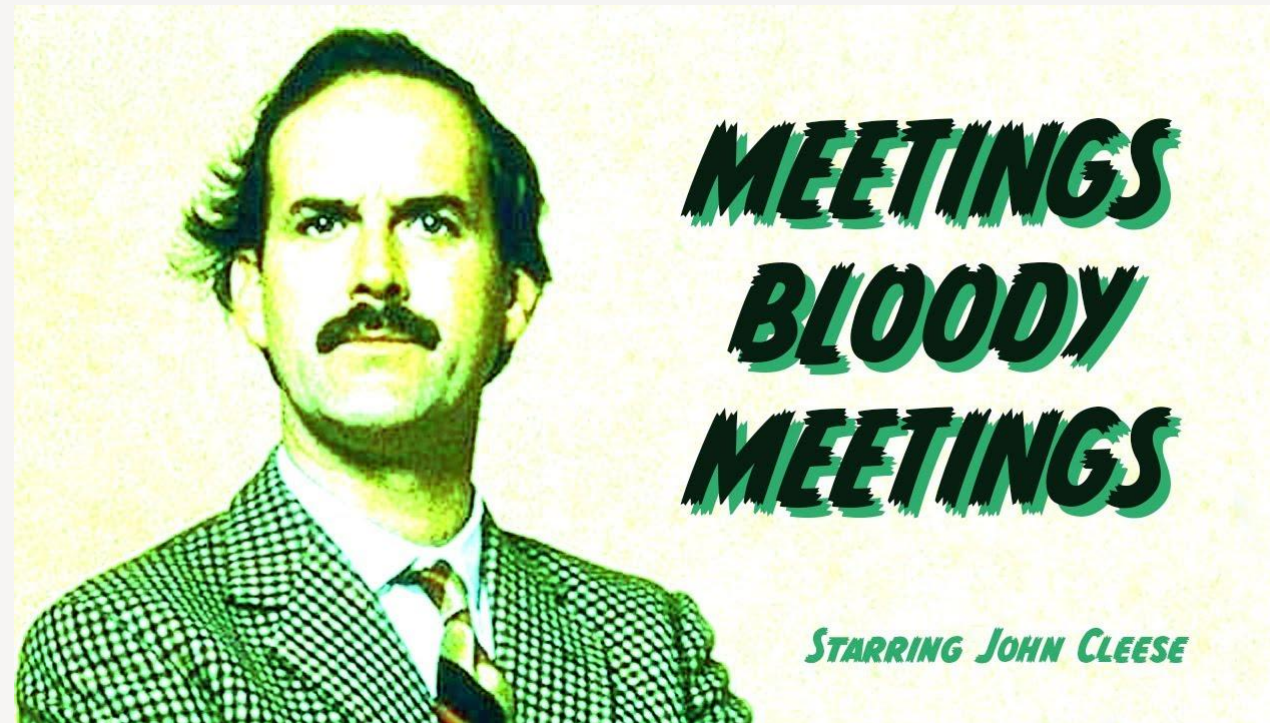
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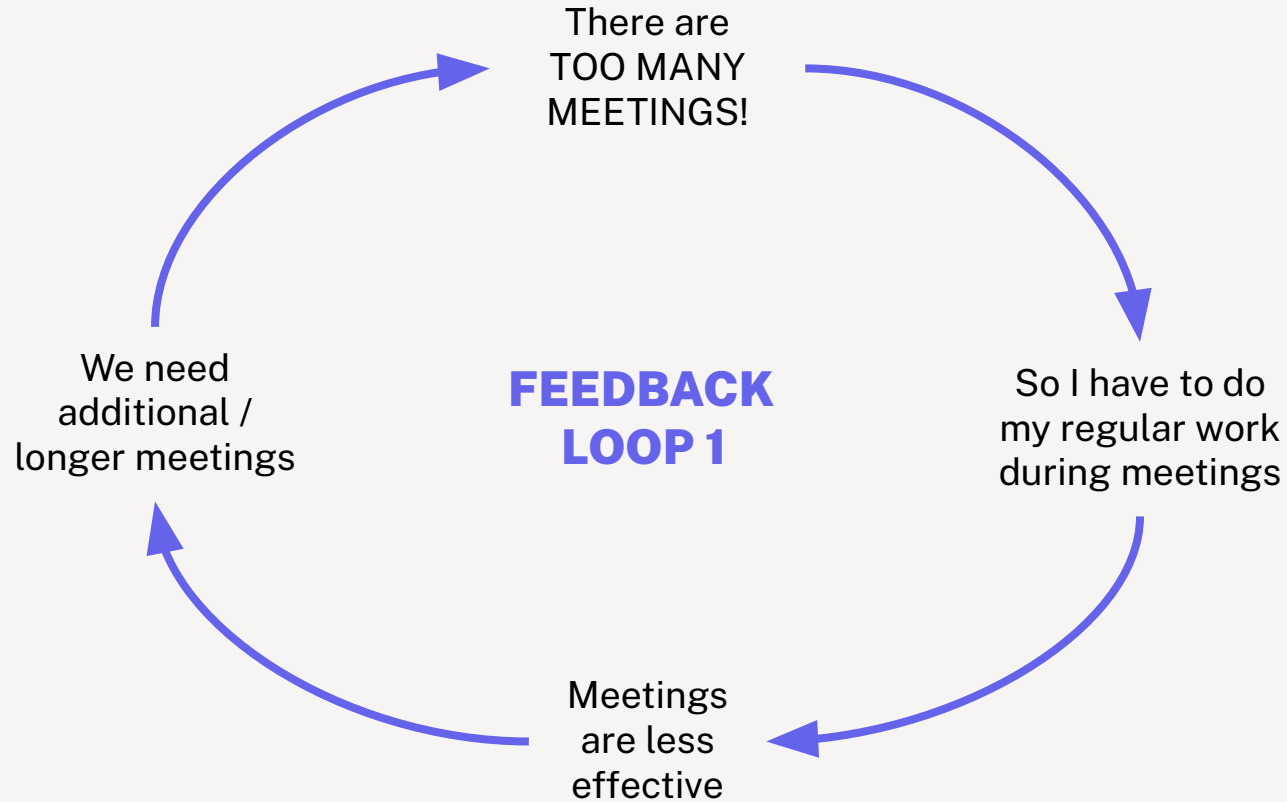
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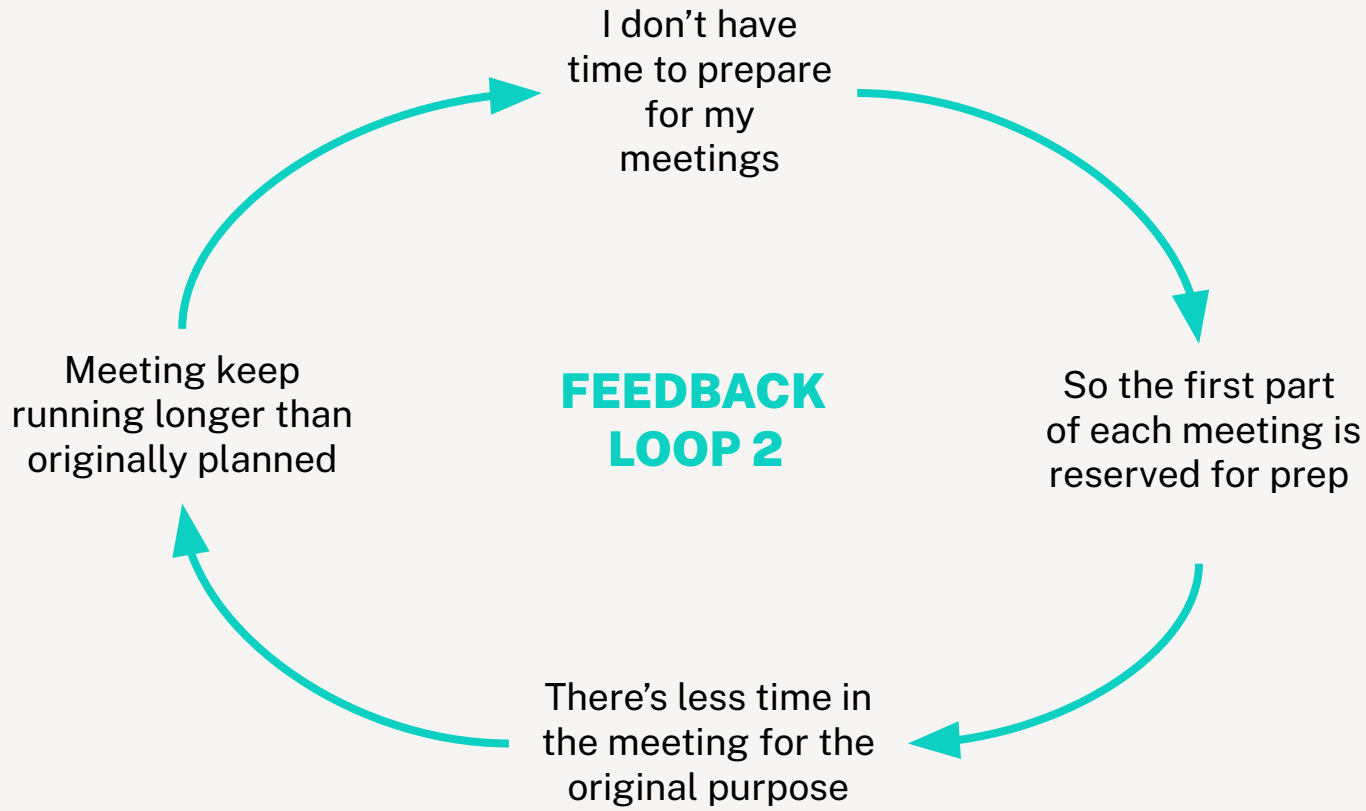
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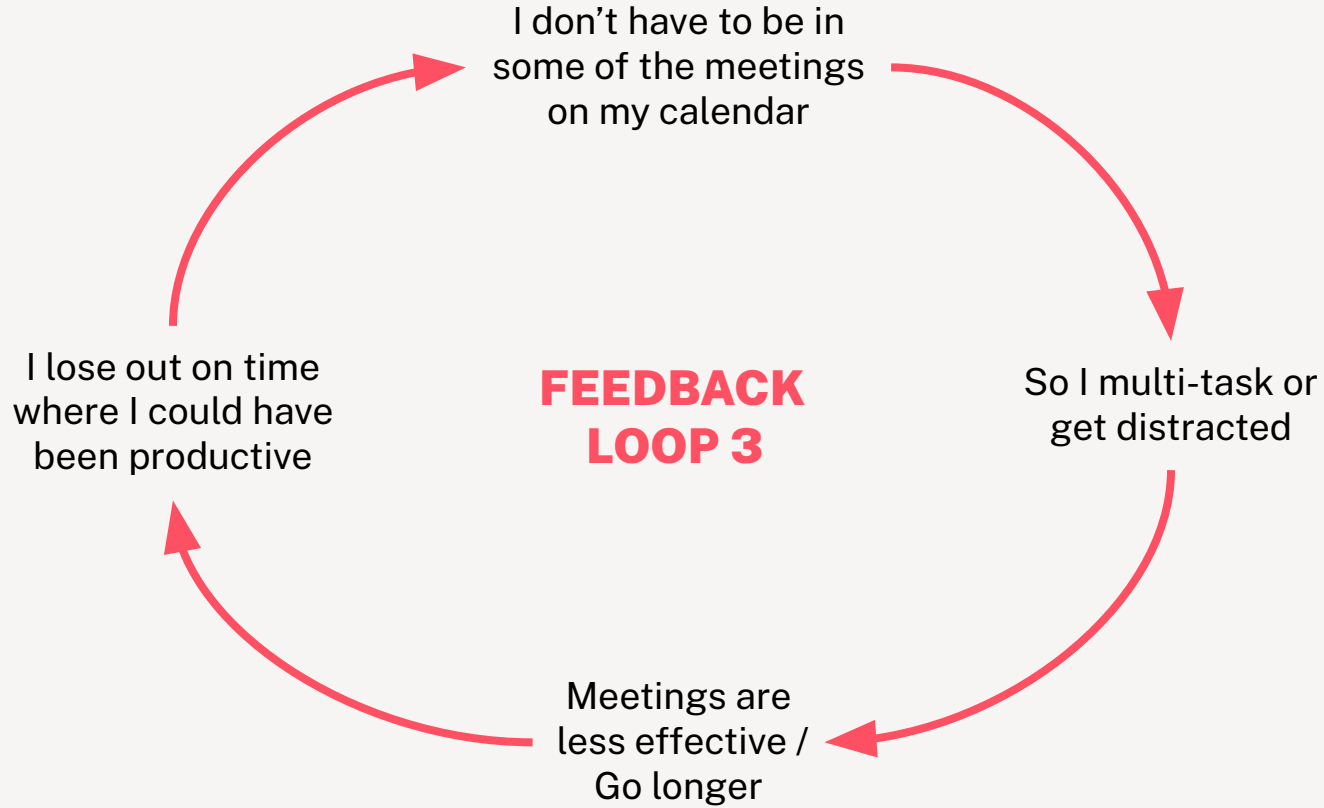
Modality

- In person
- Remote
- Hybrid









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SIMPLE SABOTAGE
FIELD MANUAL

Strategic Services
(Provisional)

Prepared under direction of
The Director of Strategic Services

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DSS REPRODUCTION BRANCH

31273

(11) General Interference with Organizations and Production

(a) Organizations and Conferences

- (1) Insist on doing everything through "channels." Never permit short-cuts to be taken in order to expedite decisions.
- (2) Make "speeches." Talk as frequently as possible and at great length. Illustrate your "points" by long anecdotes and accounts of personal experiences. Never hesitate to make a few appropriate "patriotic" comments.
- (3) When possible, refer all matters to committees, for "further study and consideration." Attempt to make the committees as large as possible — never less than five.
- (4) Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible.
- (5) Haggle over precise wordings of communications, minutes, resolutions.
- (6) Refer back to matters decided upon at the last meeting and attempt to re-open the question of the advisability of that decision.
- (7) Advocate "caution." Be "reasonable" and urge your fellow-conferees to be "reasonable" and avoid haste which might result in embarrassments or difficulties later on.
- (8) Be worried about the propriety of any decision — raise the question of whether such action as is contemplated lies within the jurisdiction of the group or whether it might conflict with the policy of some higher echelon.

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Takeaways

- Respect people's time
- Manage expectations
- Be deliberate!

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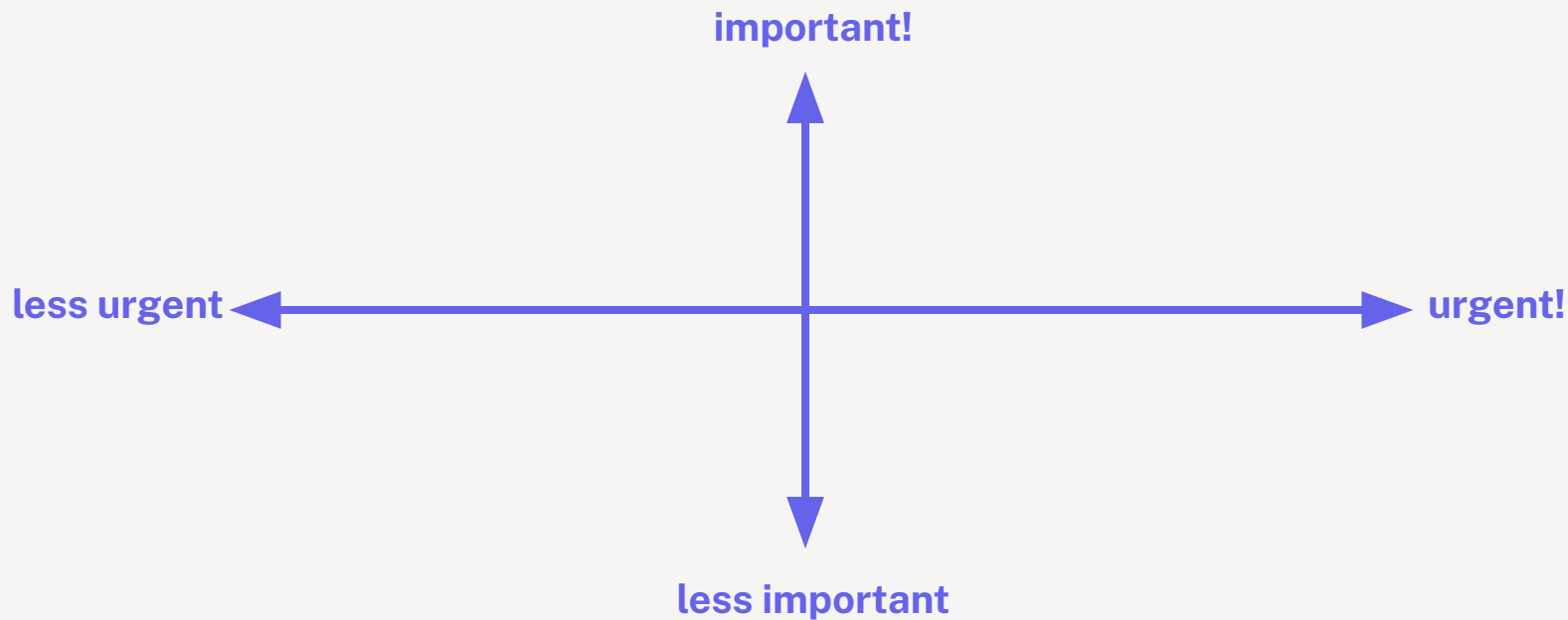
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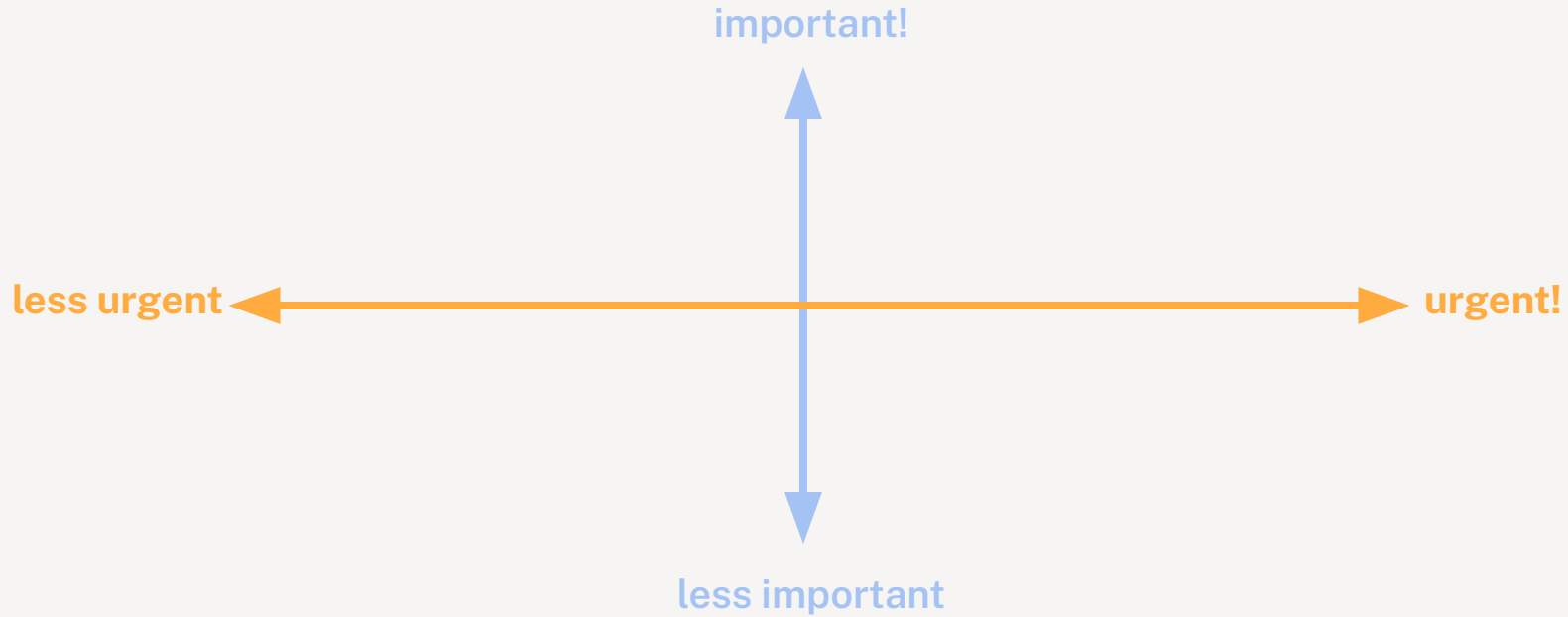
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The Eisenhower Matrix

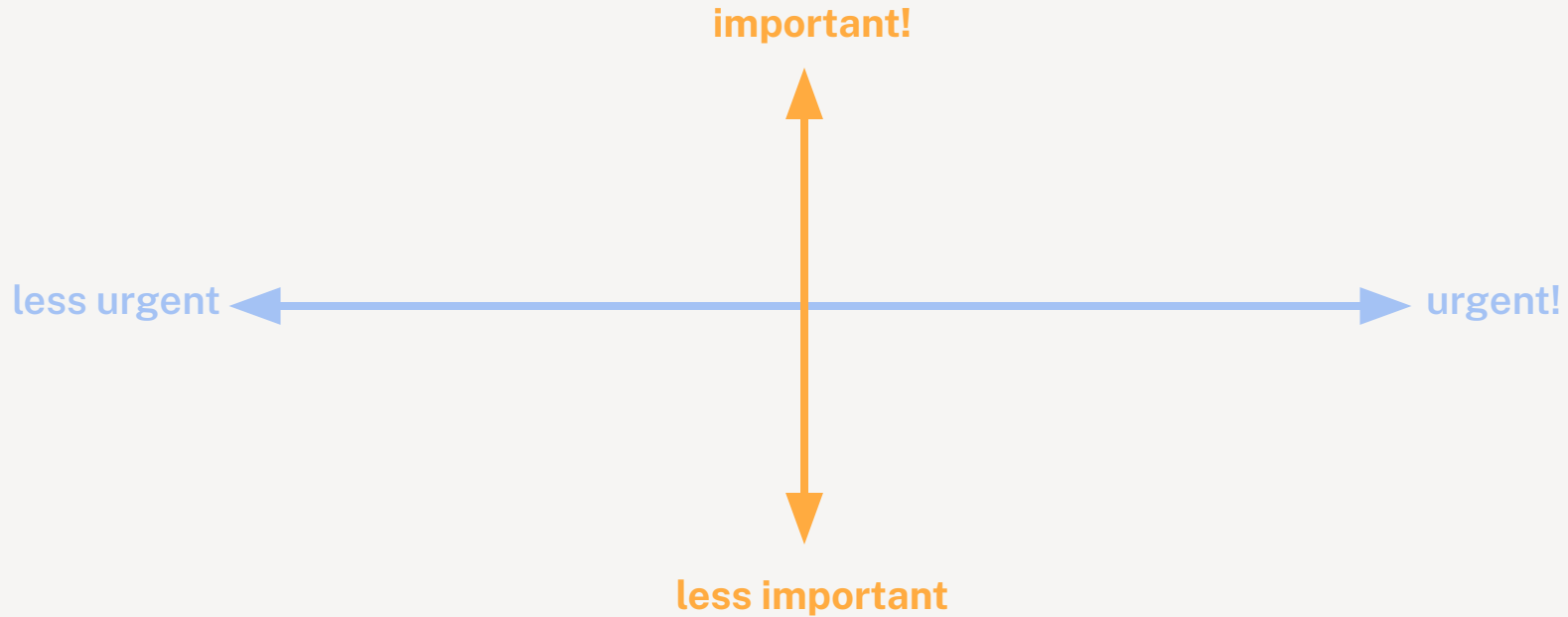


The Eisenhower Matrix

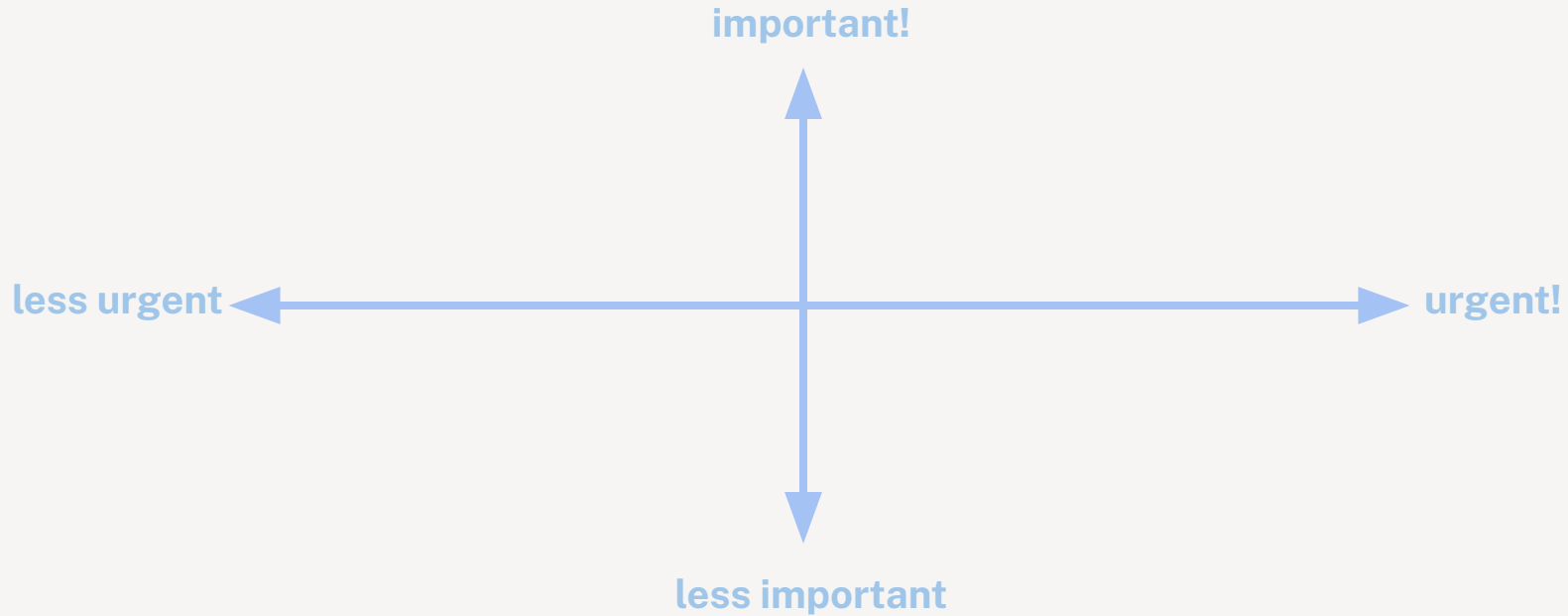




The Eisenhower Matrix

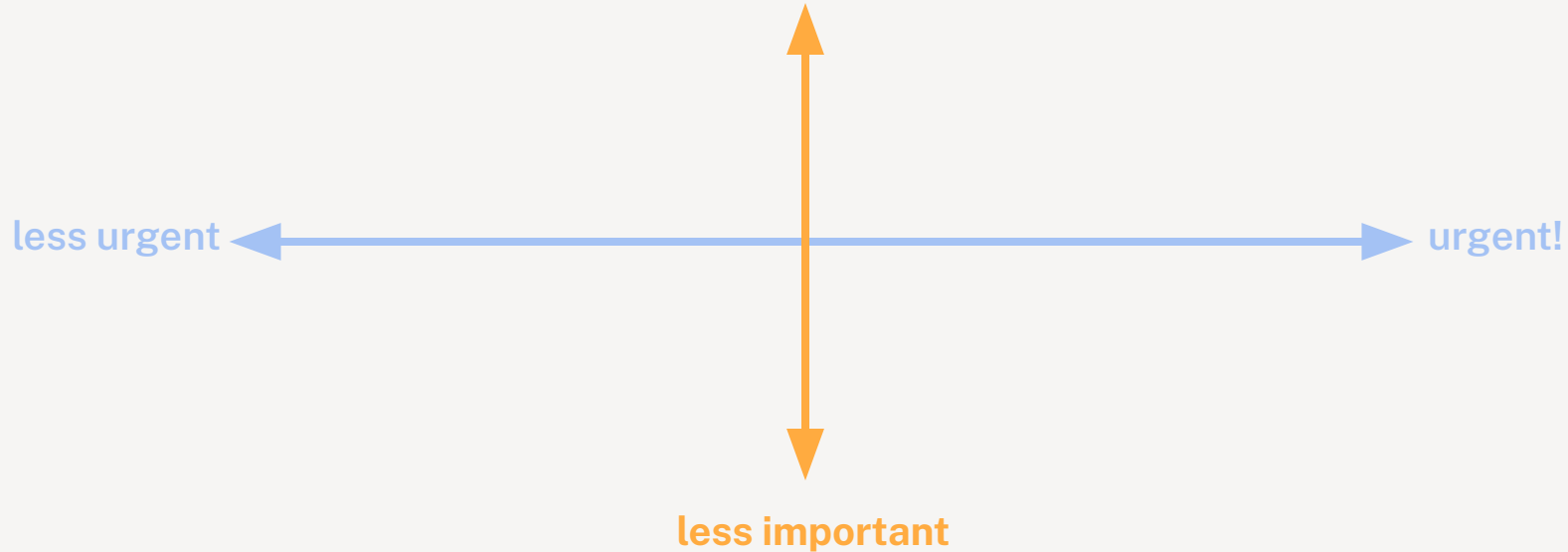


The Eisenhower Matrix **For Meetings**

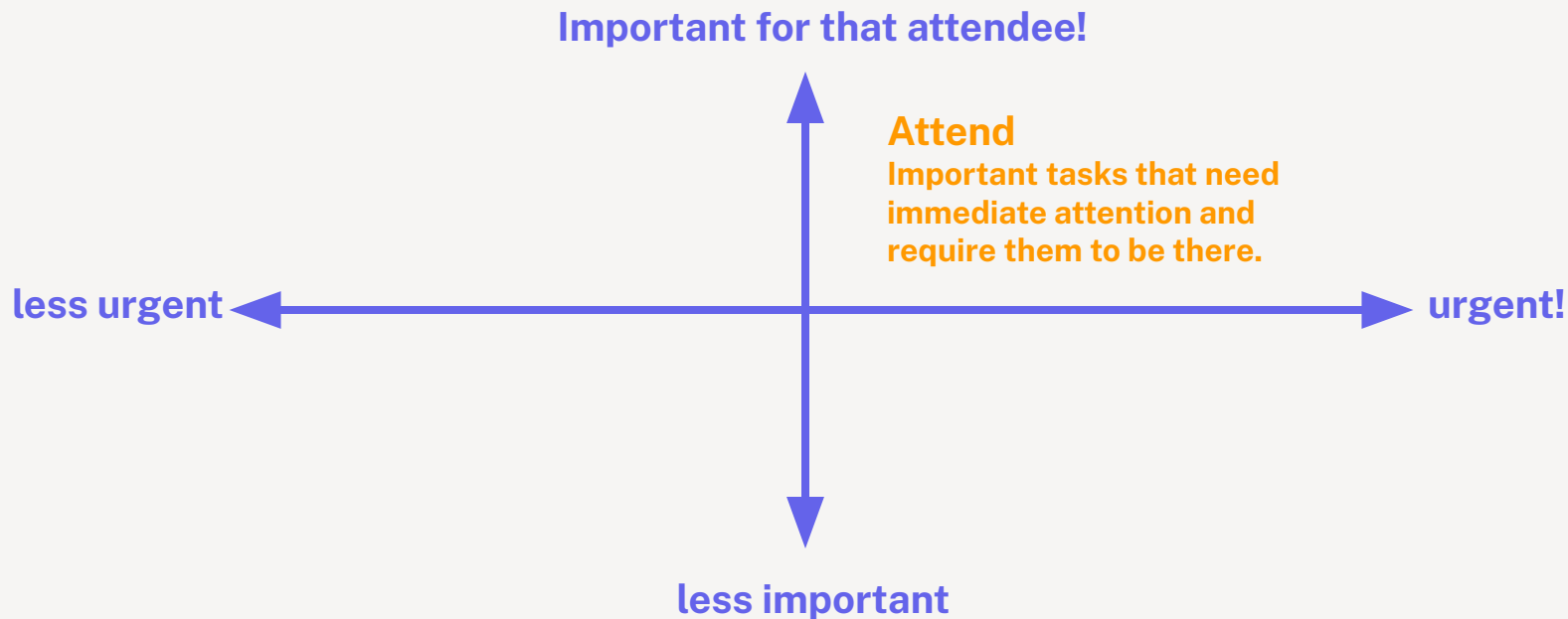


The Eisenhower Matrix **For Meetings**

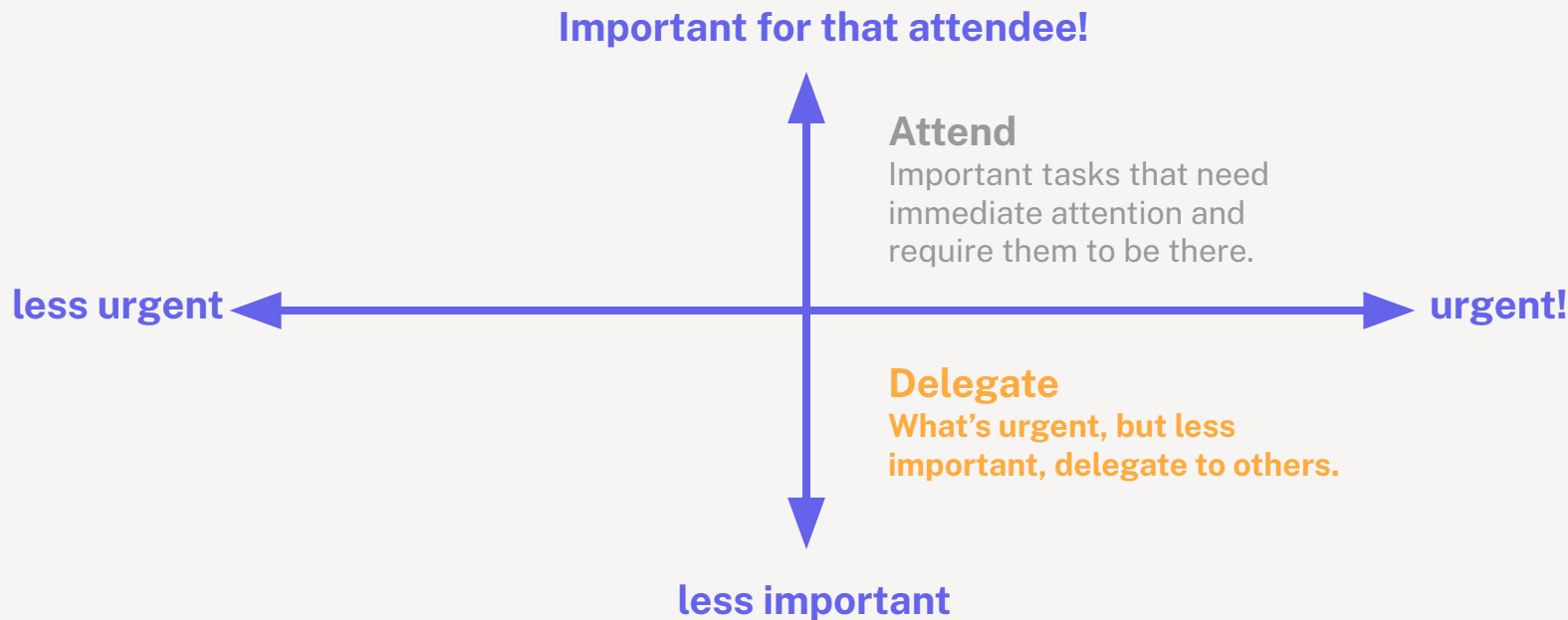
Important for that attendee!



The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings




Send

To...

Cc...

Bcc...

[Name]

SubjectRE: [Meeting Name]

Hi [Name],

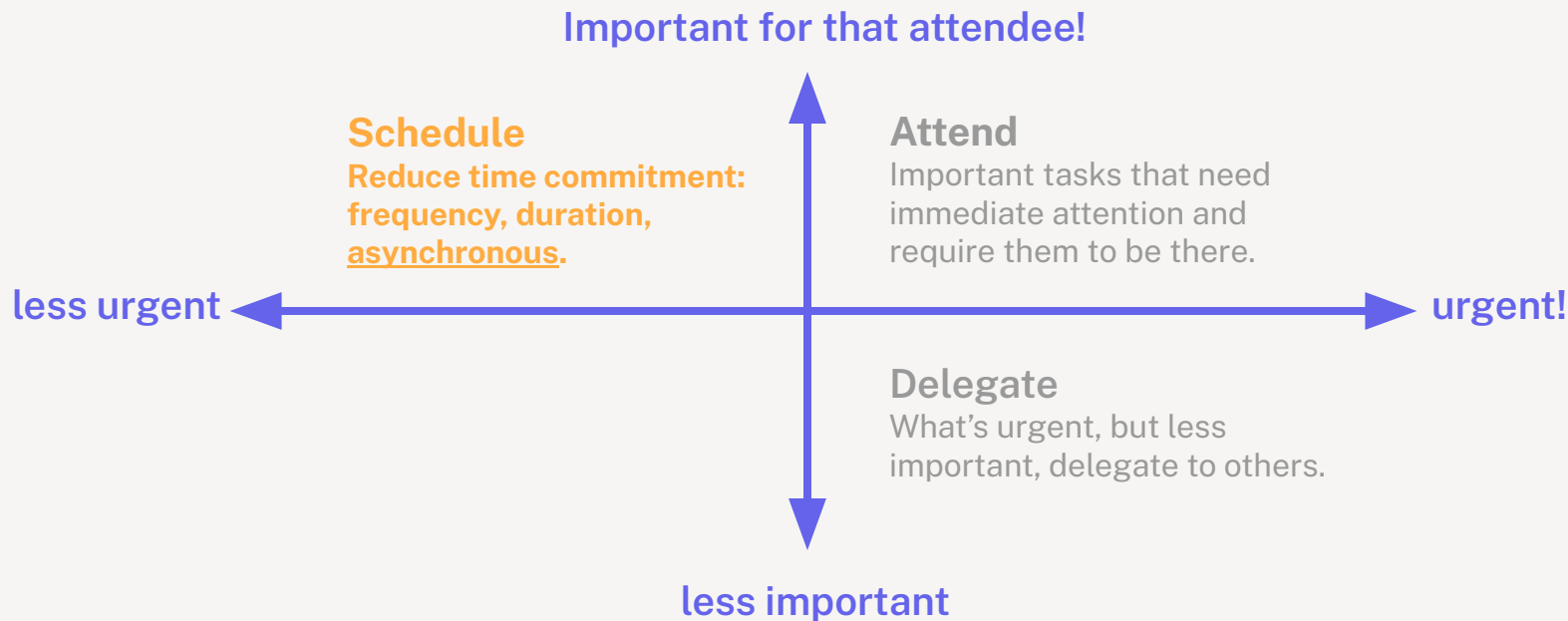
I've marked you as an Optional Attendee for [Meeting Name] on [Date/Time].

I know this decision affects your team, but I believe your perspective is represented by [Delegate]. Please feel free to attend if you think you have additional information.

We'll make sure to send out the notes and action items promptly. Let me know if you have any questions.

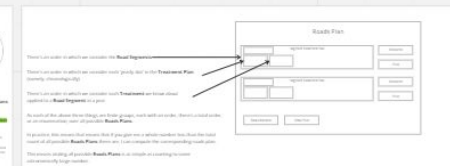
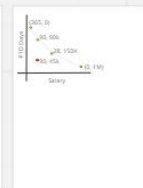
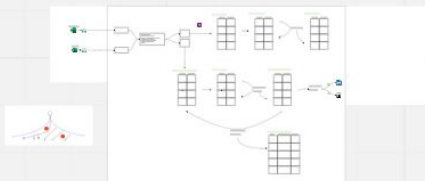
Thanks,
[Your Name]

The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings

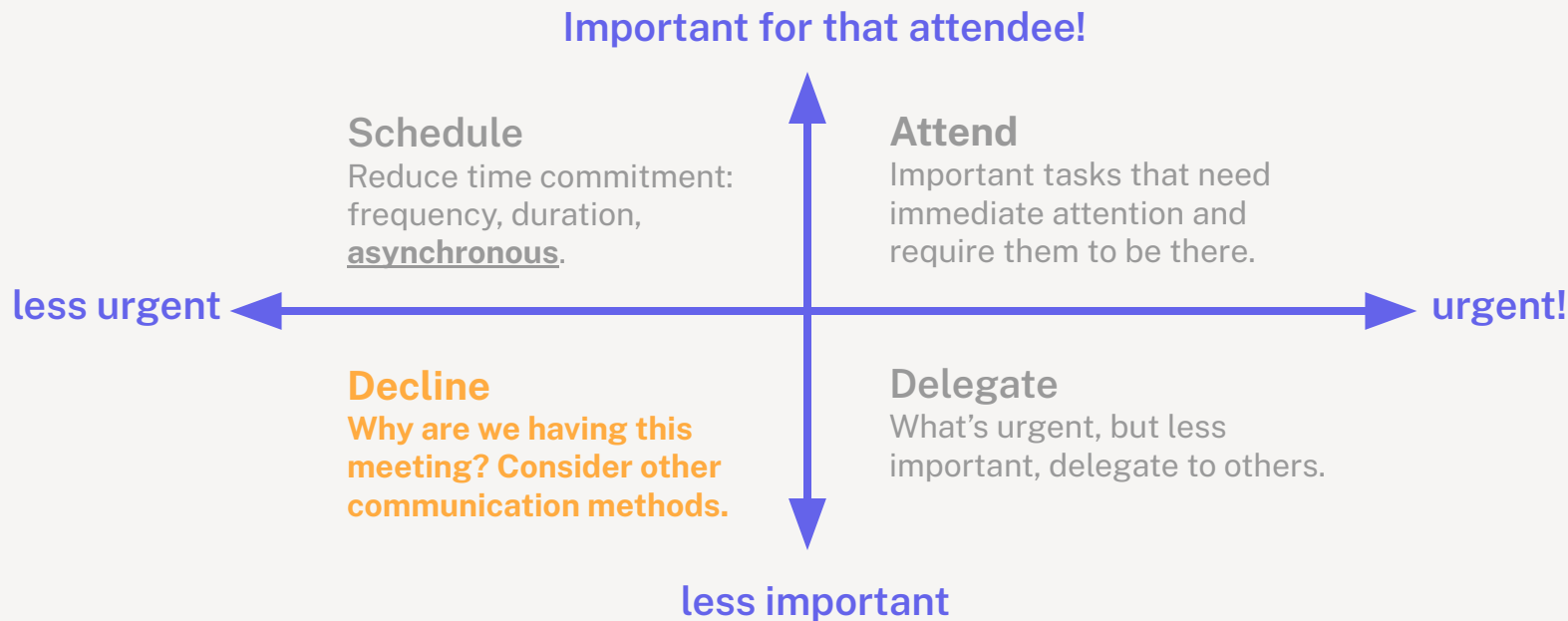


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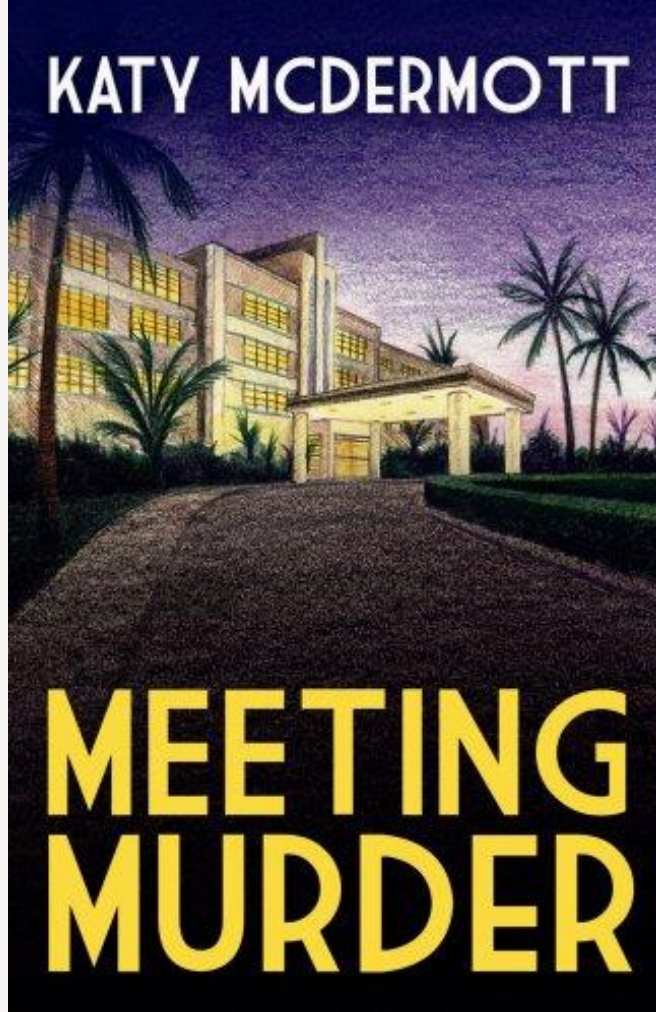
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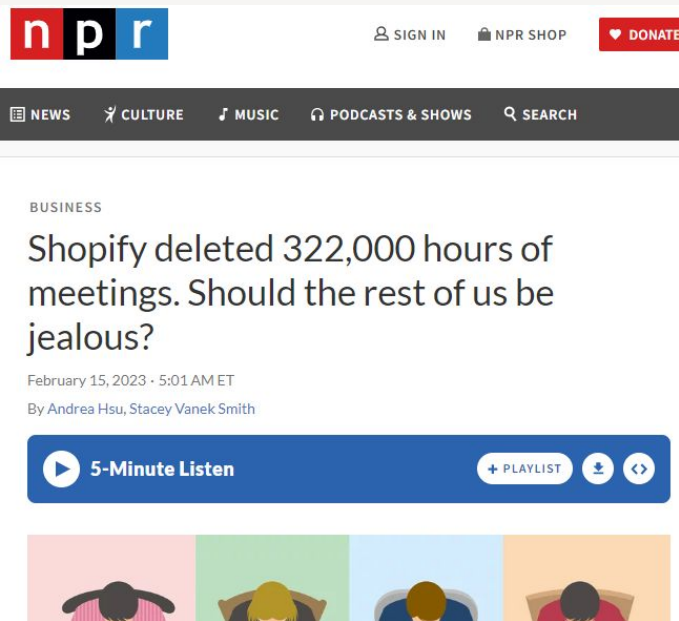


The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



KATY MCDERMOTT

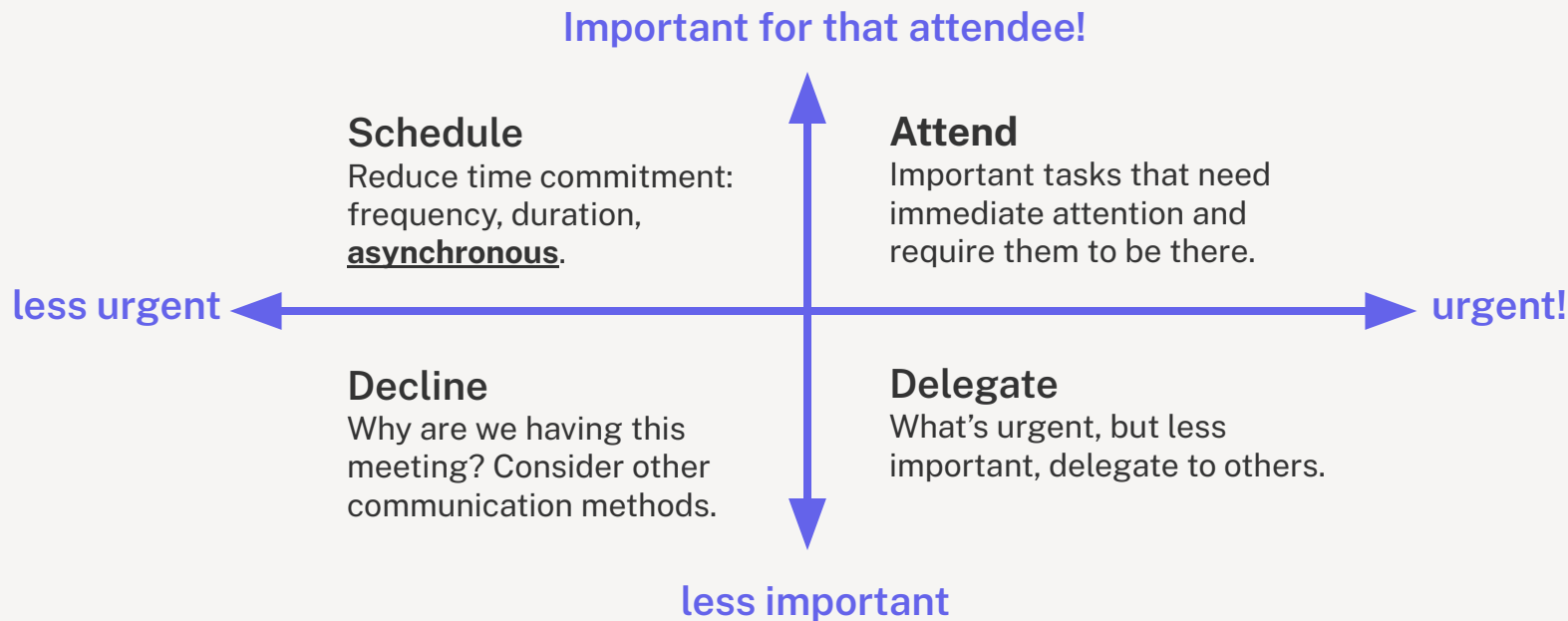




“A bot went into everyone's calendars and purged all recurring meetings with three or more people, giving them that time back.

[Shopify's COO] has gotten more positive feedback on this change than he has on anything else he's done at Shopify.”

The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



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~~(3) When possible, refer all matters to committees, for “further study and consideration.” Attempt to make the committees as large as possible — never less than five.~~

Limit the number of attendees

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~~(3) When possible, refer all matters to committees, for “further study and consideration.” Attempt to make the committees as large as possible — never less than five.~~

Limit the number of attendees *and occurrences*

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FIELD MA

Strategic S
(Provision



Eric Potter

@pottereric

Have a scream test for your reoccurring meetings. If you have to schedule a recurring meeting, set the reoccurrence to end in 6 months. If no one screams when the meeting stops popping up, you don't need the meeting. #KCDC2023

3:14 PM · Jun 22, 2023 · **339** Views

to
and
ees

Limit the number of attendees *and occurrences*

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Appointment Recurrence

Appointment time

Start: 2:30 PM

End: 3:00 PM

Duration: 30 minutes

Recurrence pattern

☐ Daily

☒ Weekly

☐ Monthly

☐ Yearly

Recur every 1 week(s) on:

☐ Sunday ☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☒ Wednesday

☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐ Saturday

Range of recurrence

Start: Wed 1/14/2026

☒ End by: Wed 3/18/2026

☐ End after: 10 occurrences

☐ No end date

OK Cancel Remove Recurrence

~~all matters to~~
~~r study and~~
~~ke the committees~~
~~ss than five.~~

and occurrences

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(4) Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible.

 You haven't sent this meeting invitation yet.



Send

To...

Subject

CHAT

Location

Start time

Wed 6/7/2023



2:00 PM

☐ All day event

End time

Wed 6/7/2023



2:30 PM

Clue

Parker Brothers Detective Game



COLUMBO



 You haven't sent this meeting invitation yet.

Send

To...

Subject

Location

Start time

Wed 6/7/2023

2:00 PM

☐ All day event

End time

Wed 6/7/2023

2:30 PM

Hi [Names/All/Everyone/Team],

I'm looking forward to meeting with you to [insert your meeting outcome]. Here's what's on the agenda for our time together:

1.

[Agenda Item #1]

Time allotted:

Leader:

Preparation Required:

2.

[Agenda Item #2]

Time allotted:

Leader:

Preparation Required:

3.

[Agenda Item #3]

Time allotted:

Leader:

Preparation Required:

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Talk soon,
[Your Name]



“Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.”

— **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Airman's Odyssey**

 Tell me what you want to do

Send

- [Agenda Item #1]-Preparation Required
- [Agenda Item #2]-Preparation Required
- [Agenda Item #3]-Preparation Required

Please let me know if you have any questions!

You haven't sent this meeting invitation yet.

Start time: ☐ All day event

End time:

Let's [insert your meeting outcome]

- [Agenda Item #1] - Preparation Required
- [Agenda Item #2] - Preparation Required
- [Agenda Item #3] - Preparation Required

Please let me know if you have any questions!

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~~(4) Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible.~~

Have clear & focused objectives in an agenda

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~~SECRET~~

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(6) Refer back to matters decided upon at the last meeting and attempt to re-open the question of the advisability of that decision.

Work breakdown for phase 1, part 1
Room - Babbage (2F CW, Capacity 12)
Robert P. Herbig

-  Quick Print
-  New E-mail to Attendees
-  Reply
-  Reply All
-  Forward
-  Private
-  Show As ▶
-  Categorize ▶
-  Meeting Notes
-  Cancel Meeting

Send

To...

Cc...

Bcc...

Alice, Bob, Carol, David, Eve


Subject

RE: [Meeting Name]

-----Original Appointment-----
From: Robert P. Herbig
Sent: [...]
To: [...]
Subject: [Meeting Name]
When: [...]
Where: [...]




To...



Cc...



Bcc...



Send

Alice, Bob, Carol, David, Eve

SubjectRE: [Meeting Name]

Hi [Names/All/Everyone/Team],

Thanks again for your time [whenever]. We made great progress on [topic/outcome].

As a reminder, we decided that [insert decision].

I've attached/linked notes from our meeting for future reference.


Before our next meeting on [date], please remember to complete your assigned action items, which are listed below:

- [Name] -[Action Item]
- [Name] -[Action Item]
- [Name] -[Action Item]

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,
[Your Name]

-----Original Appointment-----
From: Robert P. Herbig
Sent: [...]
To: [...]
Subject: [Meeting Name]
When: [...]



To...
Cc...
Bcc...

Alice, Bob, Carol, David, Eve

Send

Subject RE: [Meeting Name]

Hi [Names/All/Everyone/Team],

Thanks again for your time [whenever]. We made great progress on [topic/outcome].

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- **[Name]** -[Action Item]
 - **[Name]** -[Action Item]
 - **[Name]** -[Action Item]

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,
[Your Name]

-----Original Appointment-----

From: Robert P. Herbig

Sent: [...]

To: [...]

Subject: [Meeting Name]

When: [...]

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Follow-up with action items

Simple Sabotage Field Manual

- ~~Attempt to make the committees as large as possible — never less than five.~~
- ~~Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible.~~
- ~~Refer back to matters decided upon at the last meeting and attempt to re-open the question of the advisability of that decision.~~

- Limit the number of attendees
- Have a clear, focused, objective
- Follow-up with action items

Simple Sabotage Field Manual

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- Limit the number of attendees
- Have a clear, focused, objective
- Follow-up with action items
- **End meetings when the goal has been reached**



“Your job isn’t to build more software faster. It’s to maximize the outcome and impact you get from what you choose to build.”

— Jeff Patton, *User Story Mapping*

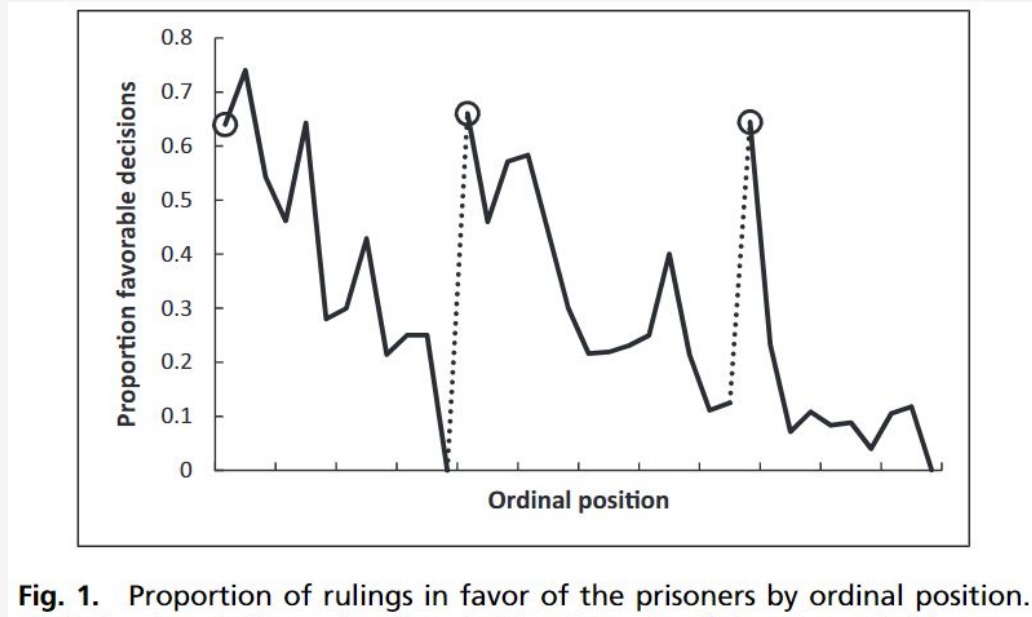
“How to Make Sure Your Daily Scrum Ends on Time”



- Limit the number of attendees
- Have a clear, focused, objective
- Follow-up with action items
- End a meeting when the goal has been reached



Consider the environment and logistics



Consider the environment and logistics

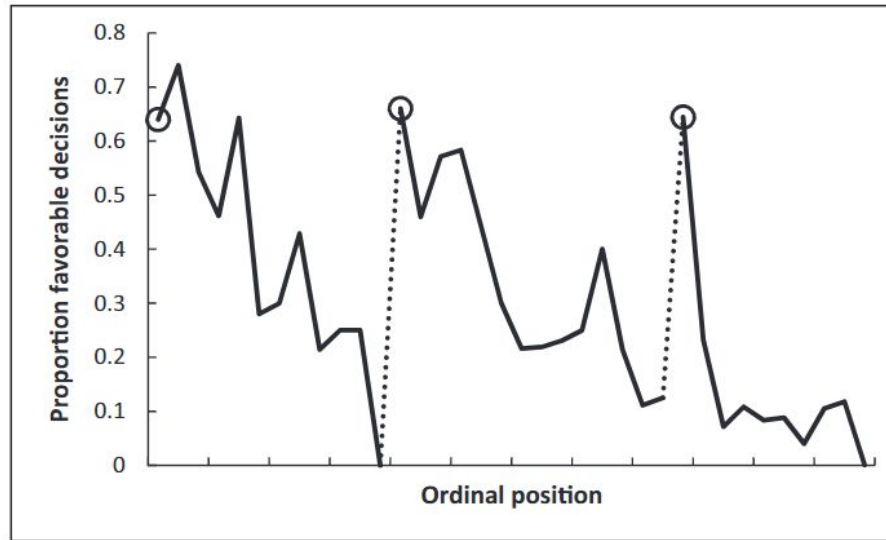
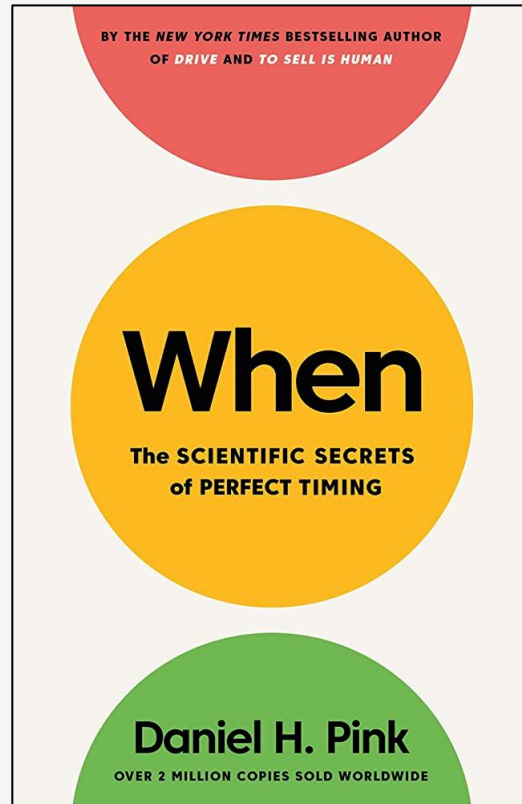
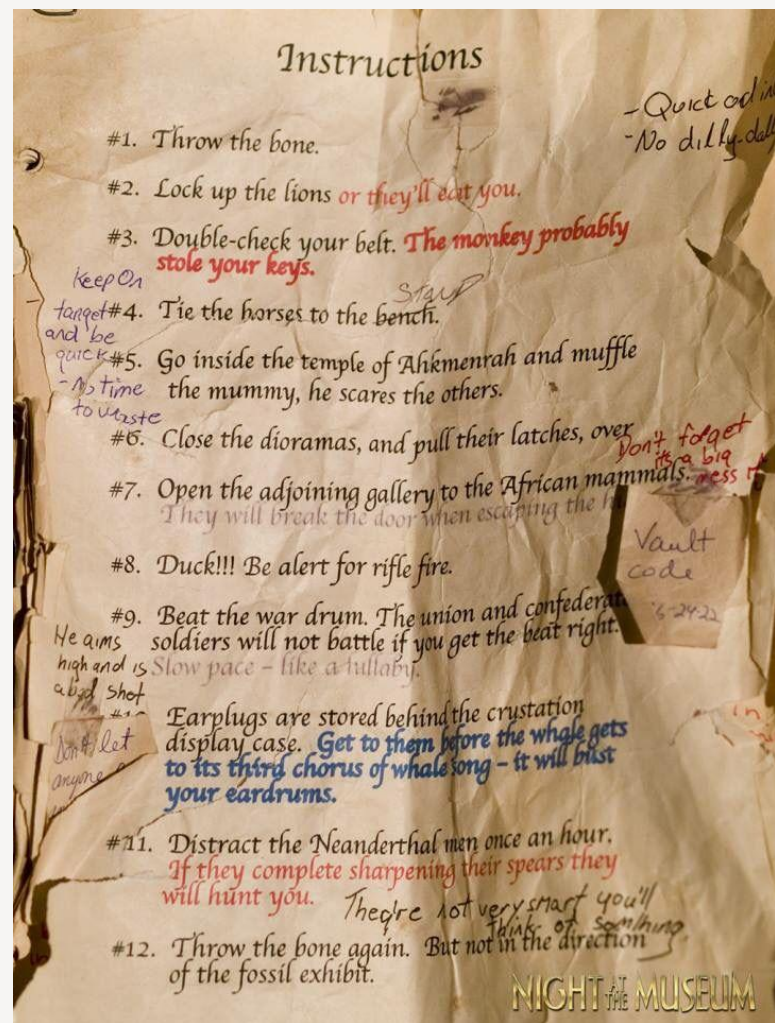


Fig. 1. Proportion of rulings in favor of the prisoners by ordinal position. Circled points indicate the first decision in each of the three decision sessions; tick marks on x axis denote every third case; dotted line denotes food break. Because unequal session lengths resulted in a low number of cases for some of the later ordinal positions, the graph is based on the first 95% of the data from each session.

Consider the environment and logistics





Meeting Facilitator Checklist



Guiding Principles

- Respect people's time
- Manage expectations
- Be deliberate!

Before the Meeting

- ☐ Consider:
 - ☐ Does this need to be a meeting?
 - ☐ Can it be an email?
 - ☐ Can it be conducted asynchronously? (Miro, Slack, MS Teams, etc.)
- ☐ Decide who needs to be there
 - ☐ Use the Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings
 - ☐ What is the MVP - Minimum Viable Participants?
 - ☐ Remember that some attendees can be marked Optional
- ☐ Define a meeting outcome
- ☐ Create an agenda
 - ☐ Itemize the topics that need to be discussed
 - ☐ Determine who will lead each discussion
 - ☐ Note any preparation the attendees need to do
- ☐ Decide how long the meeting needs to be
 - ☐ If you're not sure, schedule a little more time than you think you need. You can always end early!
 - ☐ If needed, add buffer time for attendee preparation
- ☐ Create any necessary visual aids (e.g. slide deck, handouts, etc.)
- ☐ Acquire materials you need (e.g. printouts, hardware, sticky notes, pens, etc.)

- ☐ Pick the appropriate venue and take care of logistics
 - ☐ If travel is required:
 - ☐ Double check access requirements (parking, access codes, security, etc.)
 - ☐ Verify directions in Google Maps and Apple Maps and check for construction or other detours
 - ☐ Be clear whether or not the meeting duration includes travel time
 - ☐ If meeting virtually: test out video conferencing software
 - ☐ If meeting in person, visit the venue ahead of time and check for:
 - ☐ Noise
 - ☐ Distractions
 - ☐ Equipment
 - ☐ Think about mealtimes / food - if it's an all-day meeting, plan to have a meal and snacks
- ☐ Send the meeting invite

During the Meeting

- ☐ Make any necessary introductions
- ☐ Read in the agenda
- ☐ Facilitate the agenda
- ☐ Determine follow-up items and assign them to owners
- ☐ Use the Parking Lot - defer action items or discussion that are lower priority
- ☐ Give everyone the opportunity to leave before any "after-meeting meetings"

After the Meeting

- ☐ Send a follow-up message (typically an email)
 - ☐ Emphasize major decisions
 - ☐ Enumerate agreed upon action items
 - ☐ List anything that was moved to the Parking Lot
- ☐ If needed, schedule a follow-up meeting



“One way to [achieve your goal] is to be the change you want to see happen.”

— Arleen Lorrance, **Selected Readings in Education for Teachers and Parents**



THAT'S A WRAP!

CodeMash

Boost Goal

21/28 Boosts

Channels & Roles

NEW

Welcome

Community

general

feedback-and-suggestions

speakers

Sessions-2026

tuesday

17

wednesday

11

thursday

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Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging ...

friday

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Voice Channels

general-voice

2:26:50

CraigM

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Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings

General Session

Teams & Collab

January 9, 2026

Alyssa Diaz [Codemash]

OP

1/9/26, 4:31 PM

Speaker(s): Robert Herbig, Room: Salon H on Thursday at 8:30 AM

React to Post

Following

Robert Herbig

TOAD

1/9/26, 7:57 PM

Welcome, folks! I'll drop the slides & such in here later

Send a message in "Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings"

Online — 1

Robert Herbig

TOAD

Offline — 2

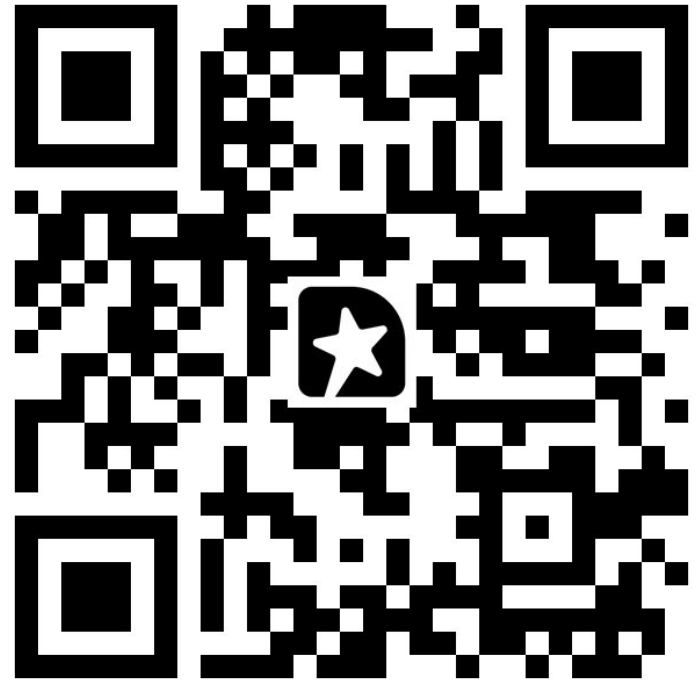
Alyssa Diaz [Codemash]

GinoA

@RobertHerbig

Takeaways

- Respect people's time
- Manage expectations
- Be deliberate!
- Fight anti-patterns & feedback loops
 - Limit the number of attendees
 - Have a clear, focused, objective
 - Follow-up with action items
 - End a meeting when the goal has been reached



Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings