

# 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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- Techniques to make meetings last longer

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- 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

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## Duration

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

# Meetings

## Type

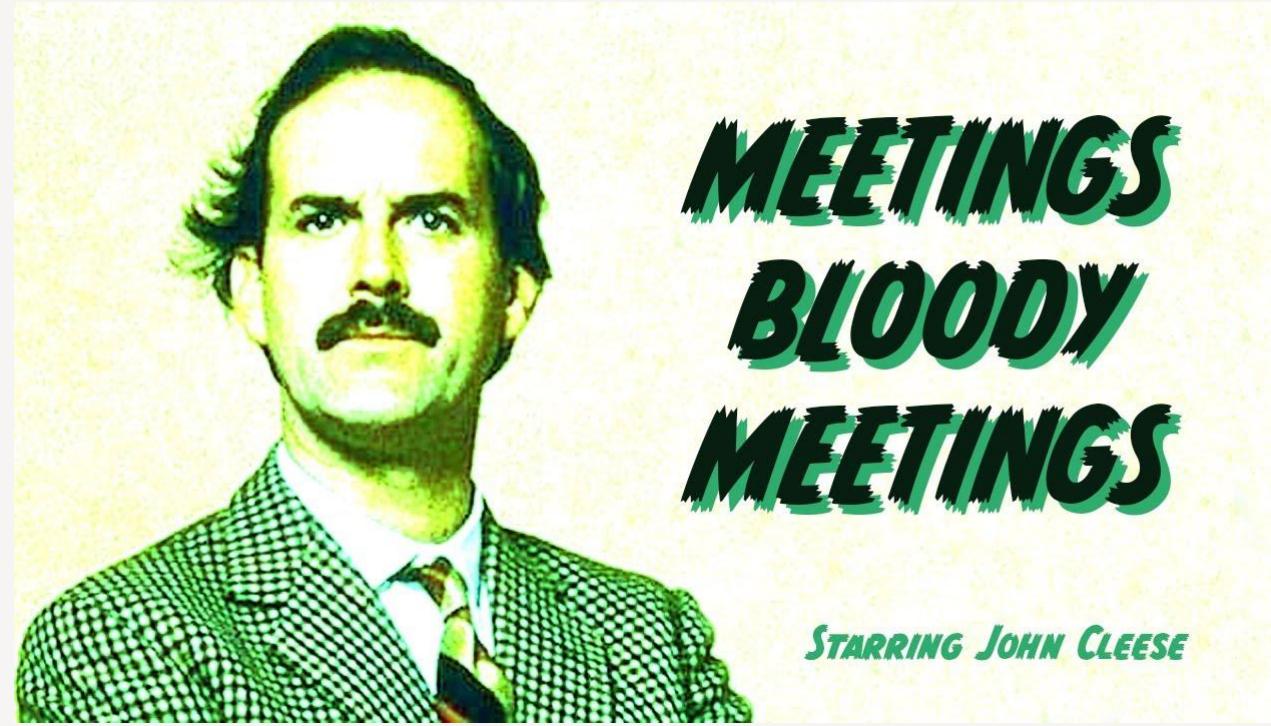
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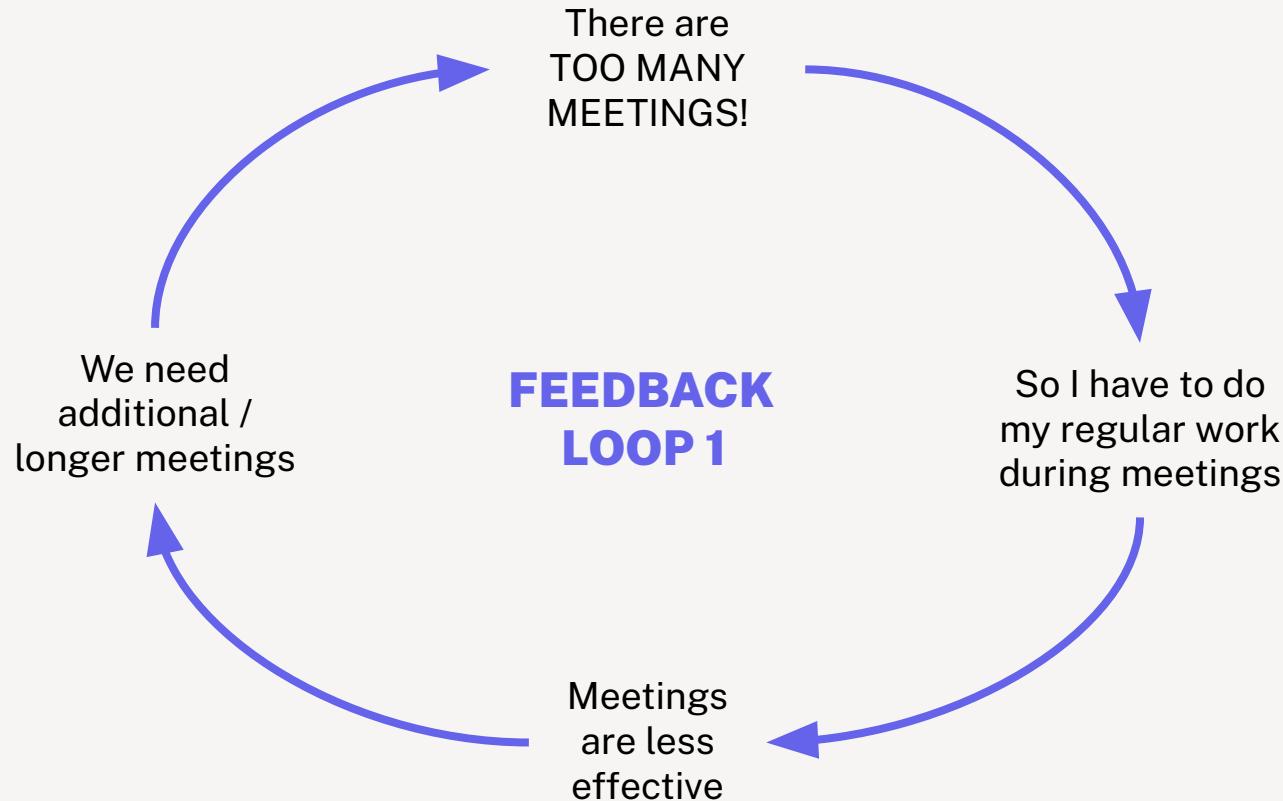
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## Modality

- In person
- Remote
- Hybrid





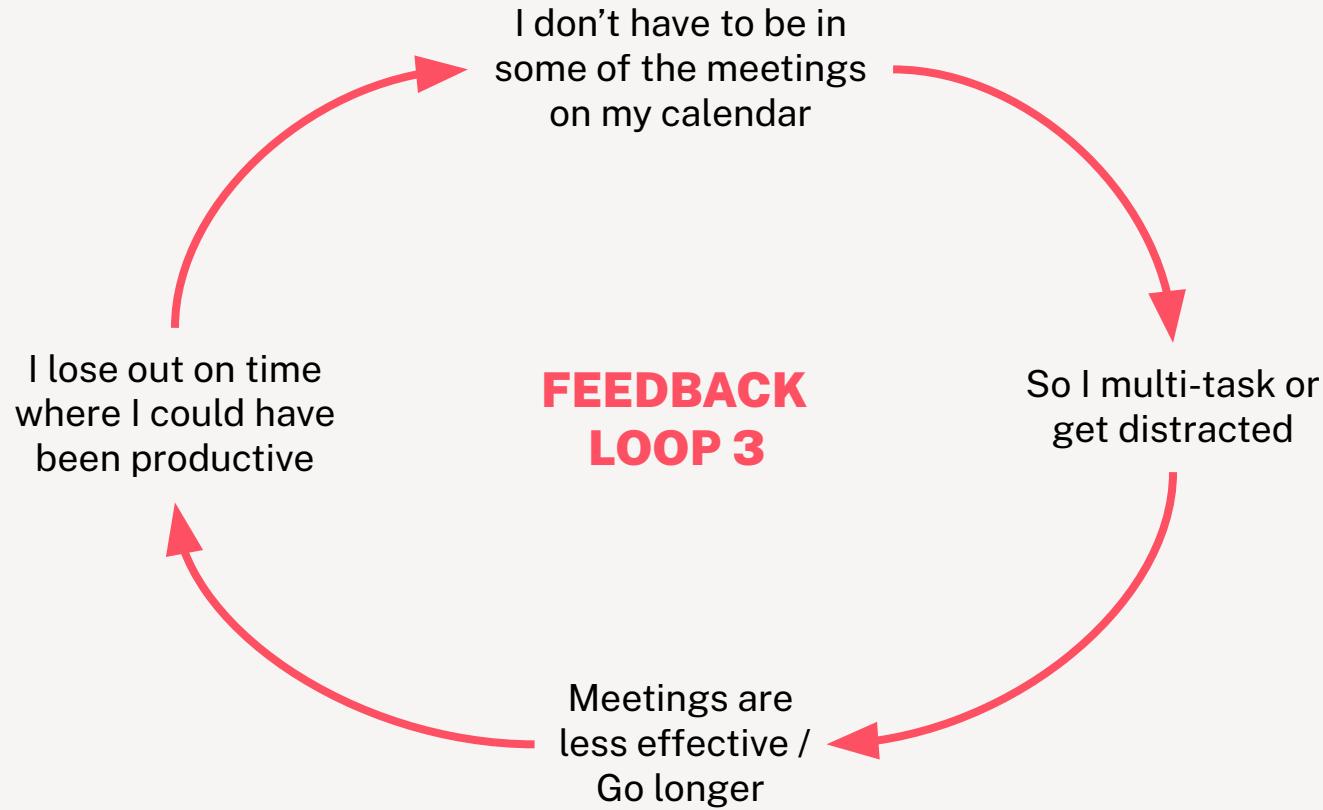
I don't have  
time to prepare  
for my  
meetings

Meeting keep  
running longer than  
originally planned

## FEEDBACK LOOP 2

So the first part  
of each meeting is  
reserved for prep

There's less time in  
the meeting for the  
original purpose



~~SECRET~~

SIMPLE SABOTAGE  
FIELD MANUAL

Strategic Services  
(Provisional)

Prepared under direction of  
The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~



Prepared under direction of  
The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

## (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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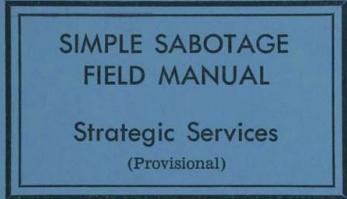
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# Takeaways

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

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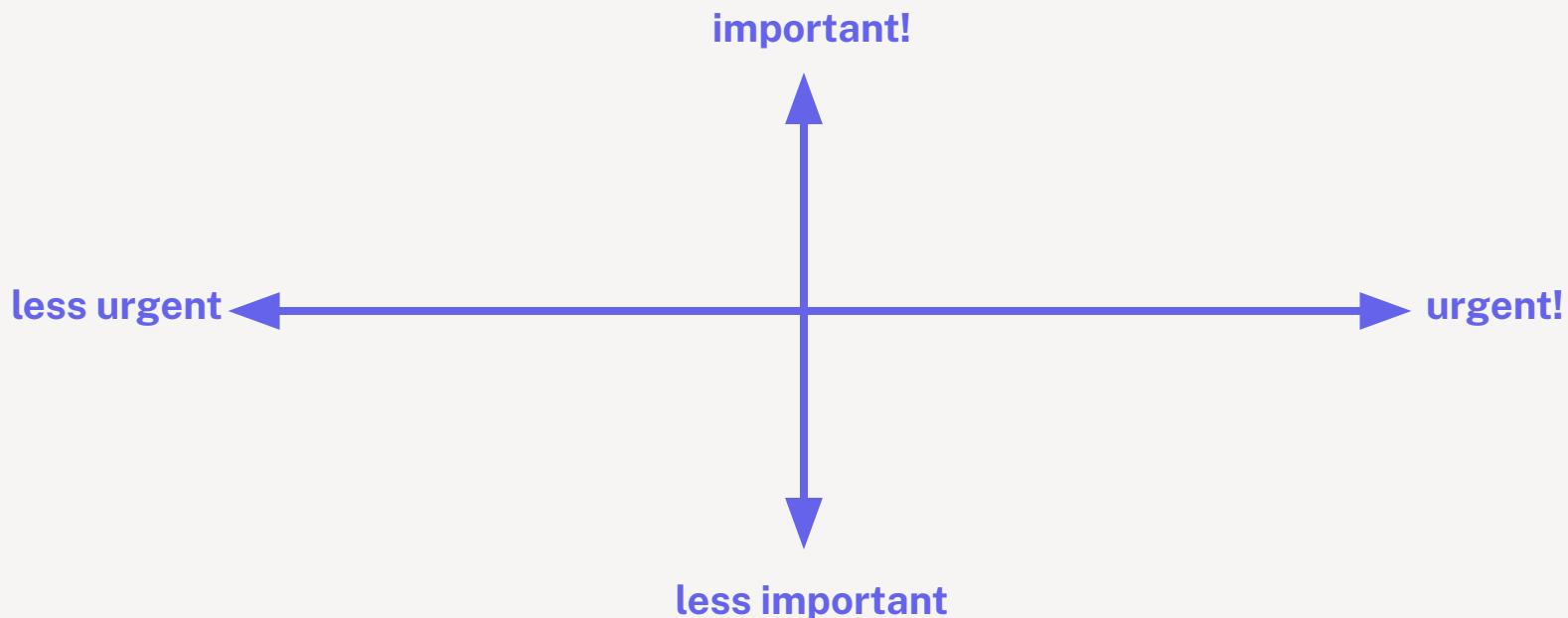


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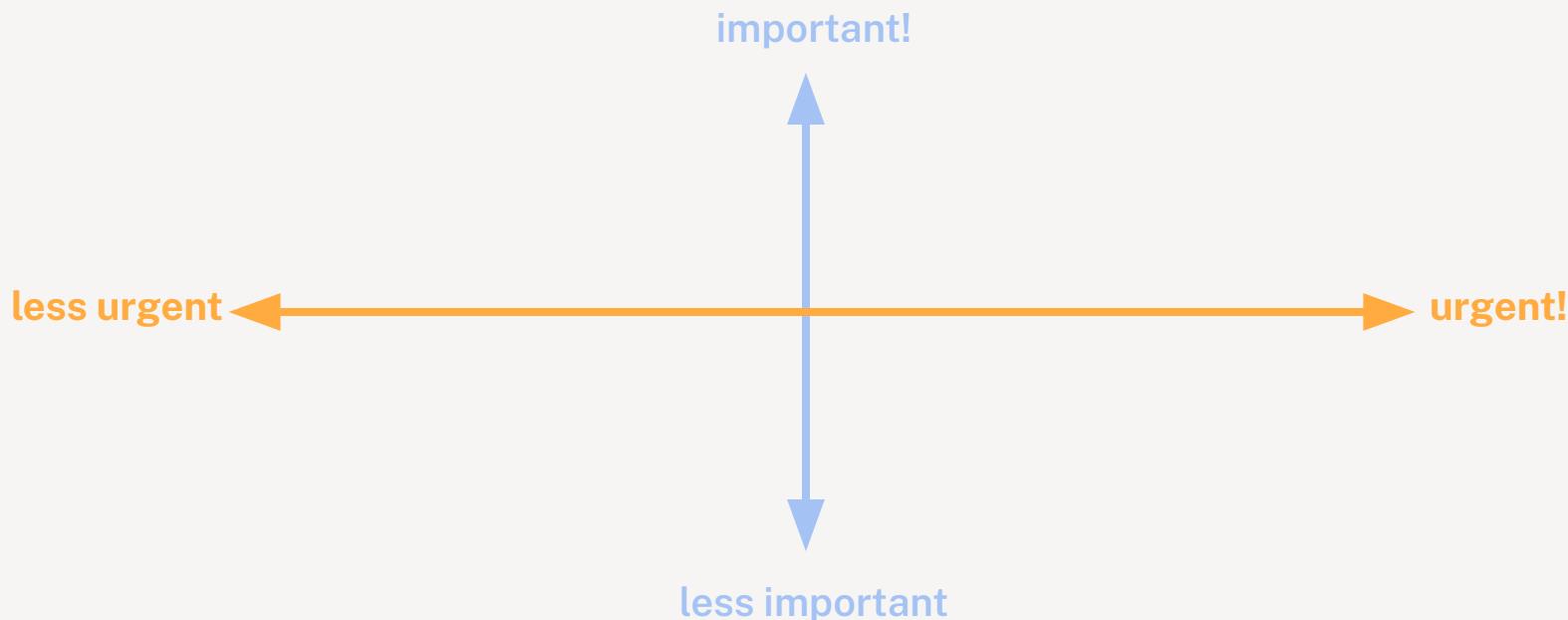
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# The Eisenhower Matrix



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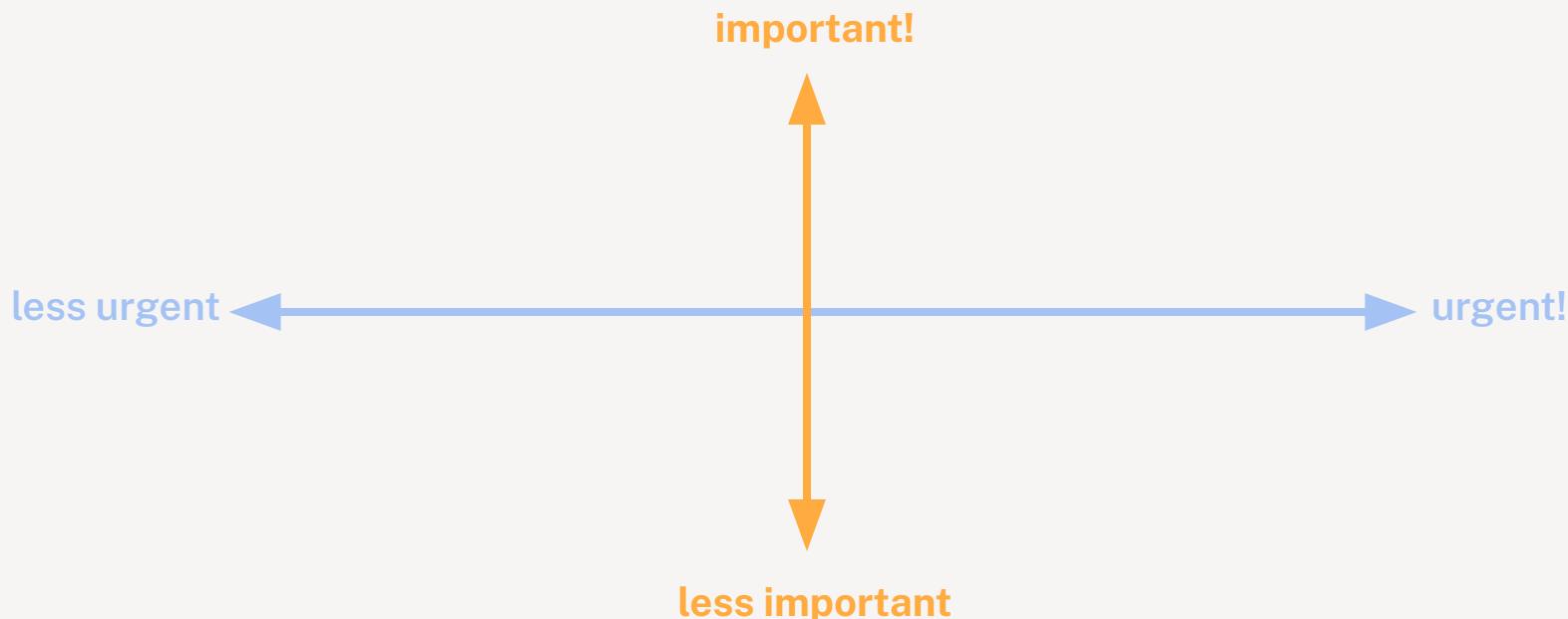


Do you work well under pressure?

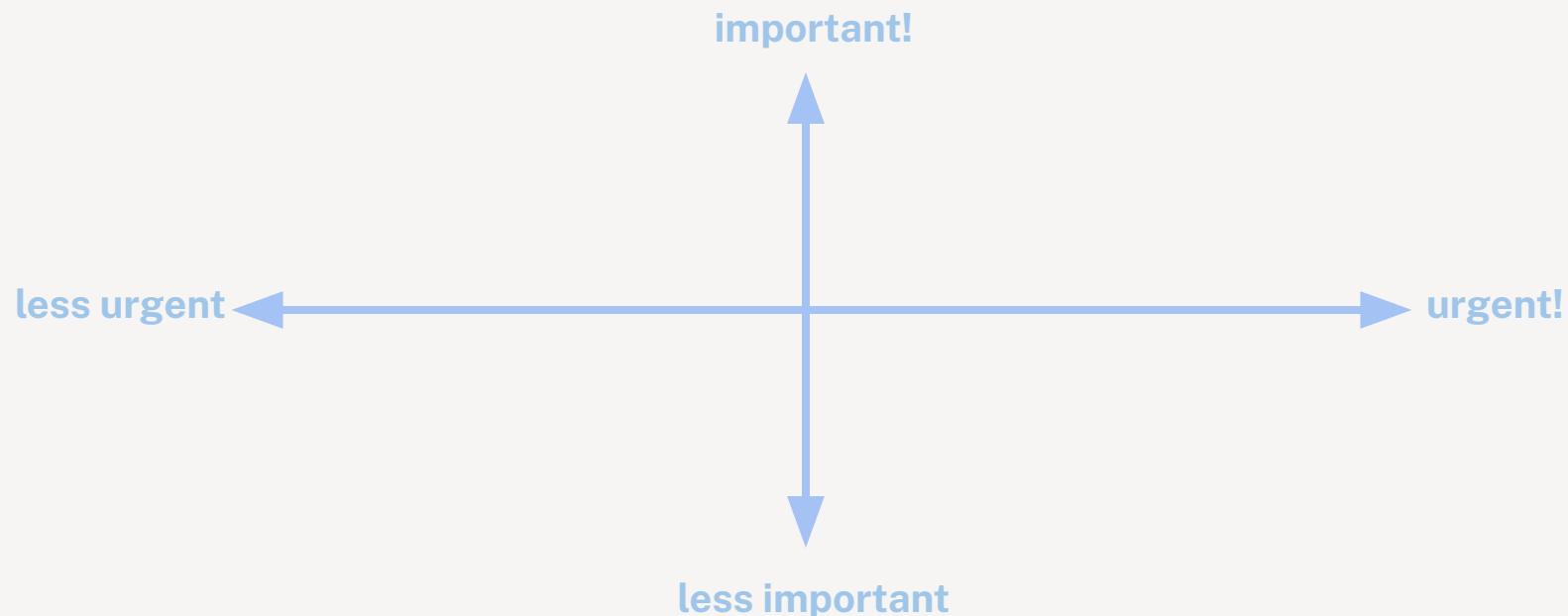


Great, because we fabricate urgency  
through poor management, uneven  
distribution of duties and an inflated  
sense of self for upper management.

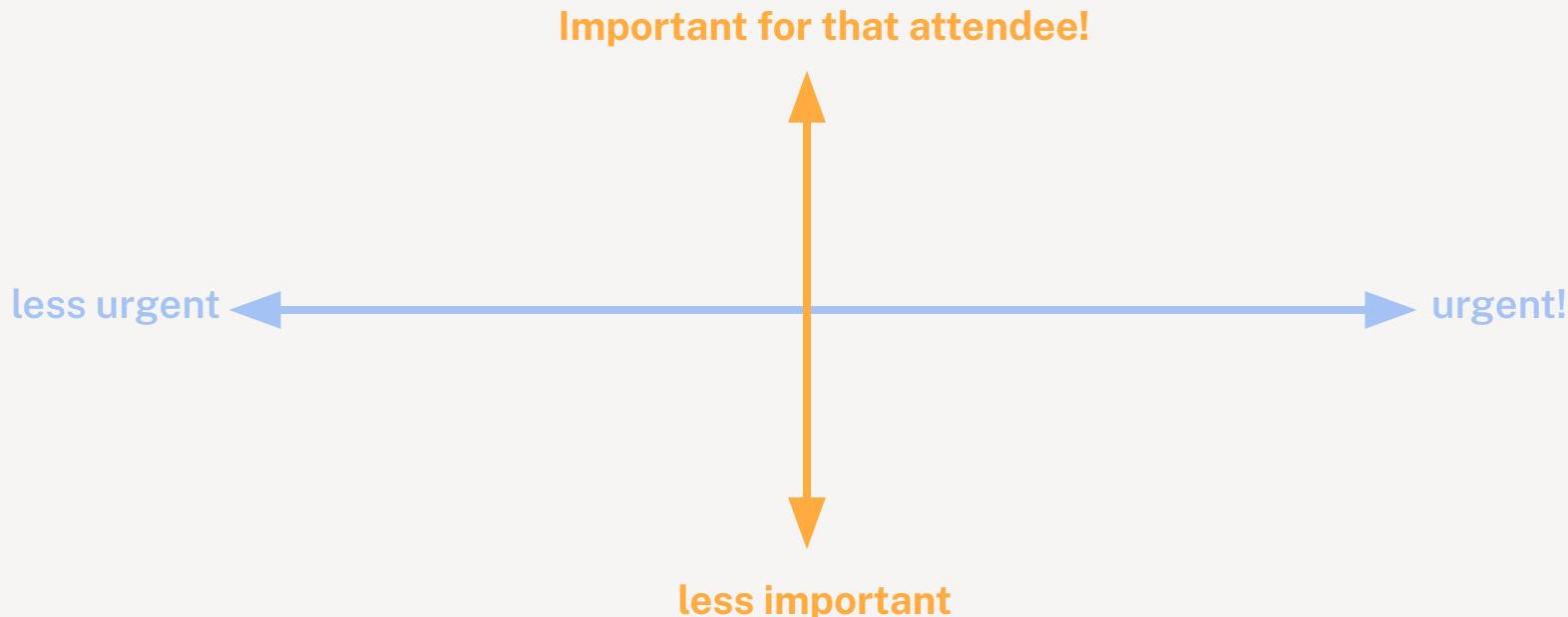
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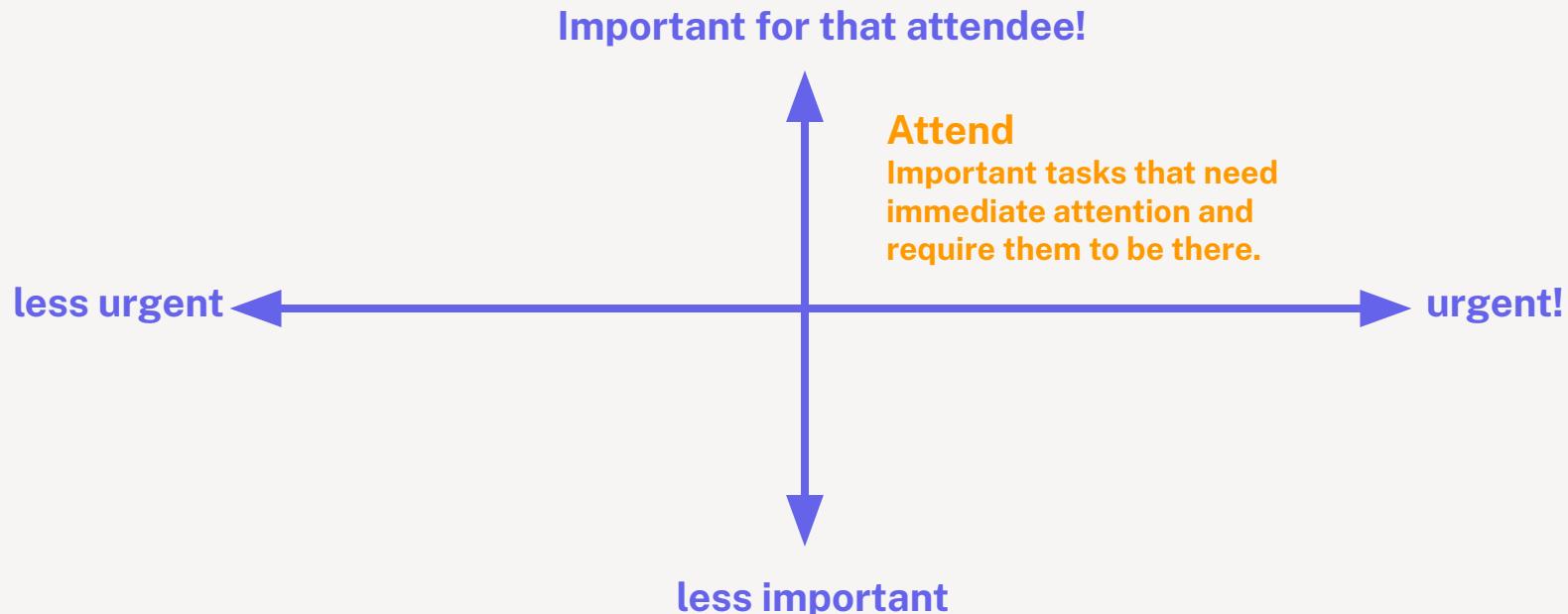
# The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



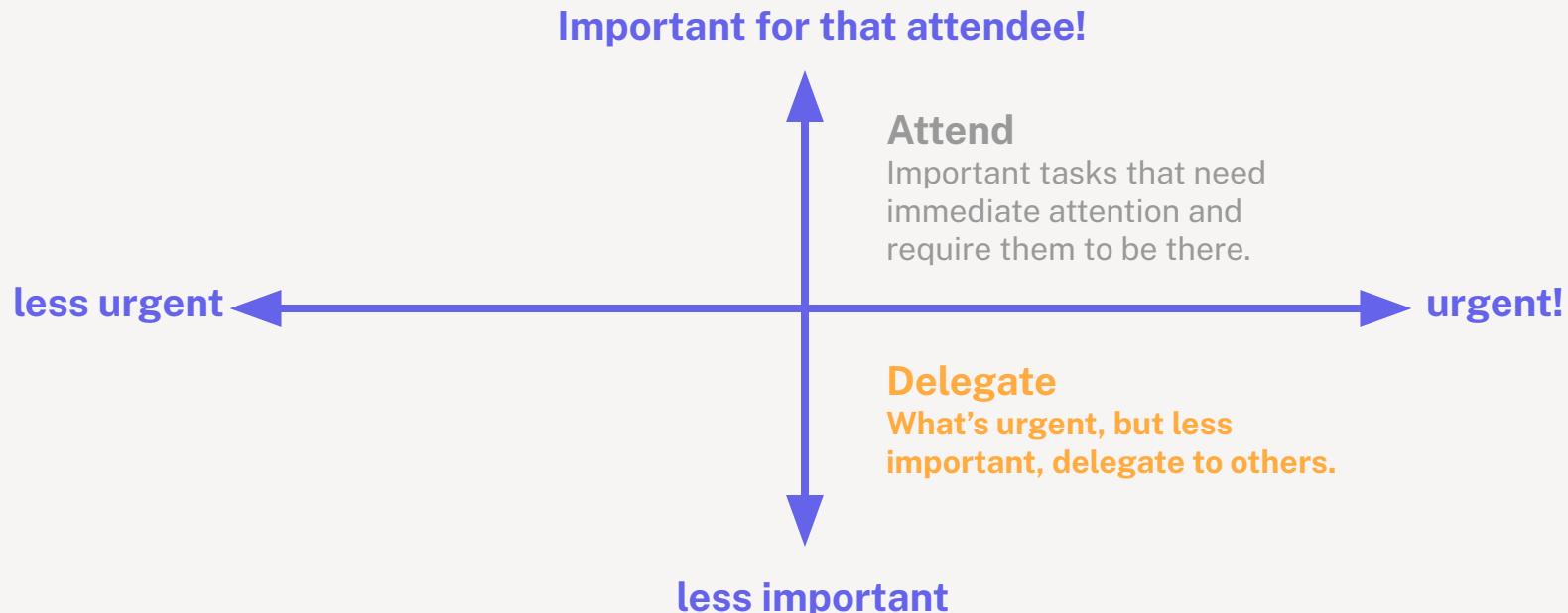
# The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



# The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



# The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings





To... [Name]

Cc...

Bcc...

Subject RE: [Meeting Name]

Hi [Name],

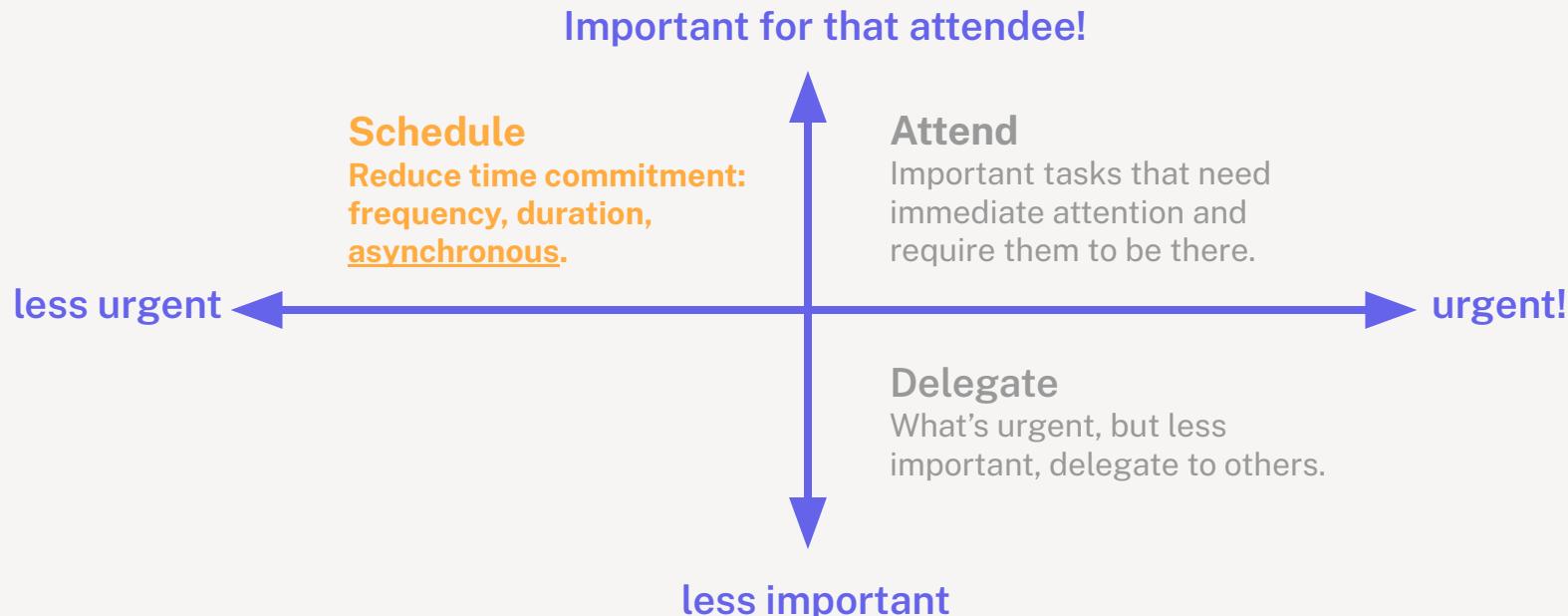
I've marked you as an Optional Attendee for [Meeting Name] on [Date/Time].

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]

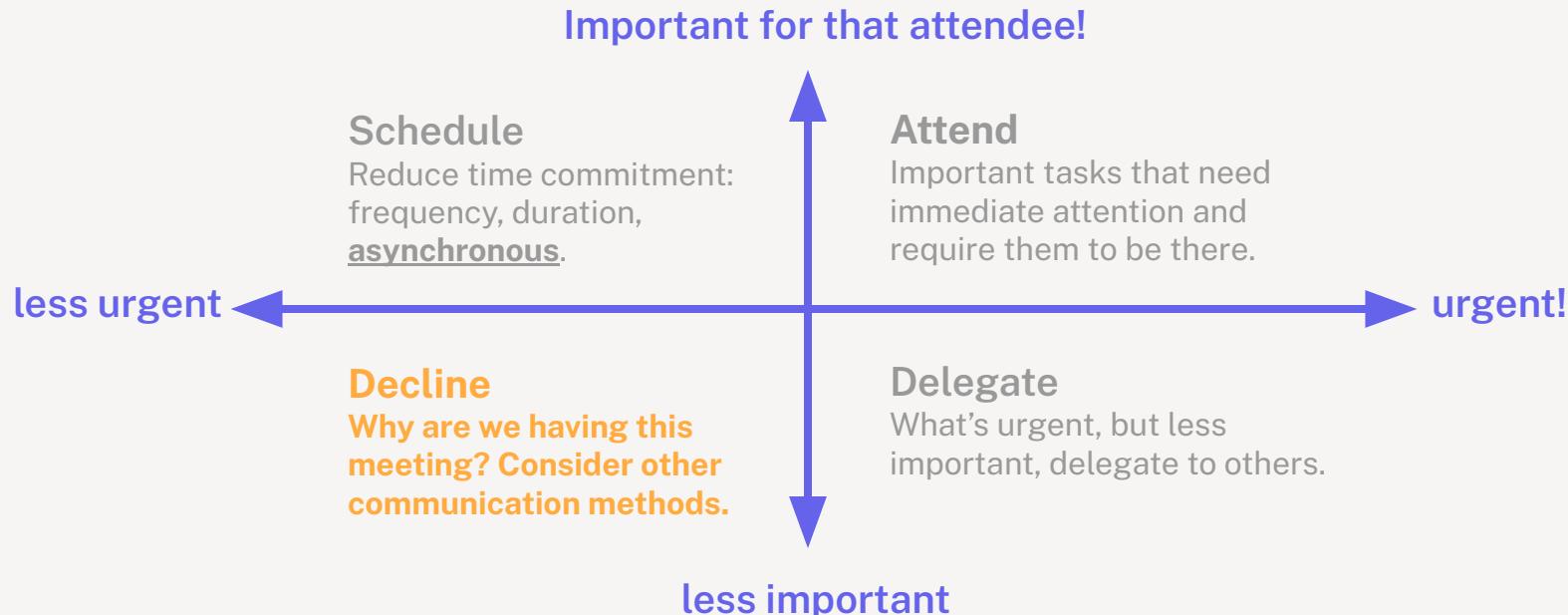
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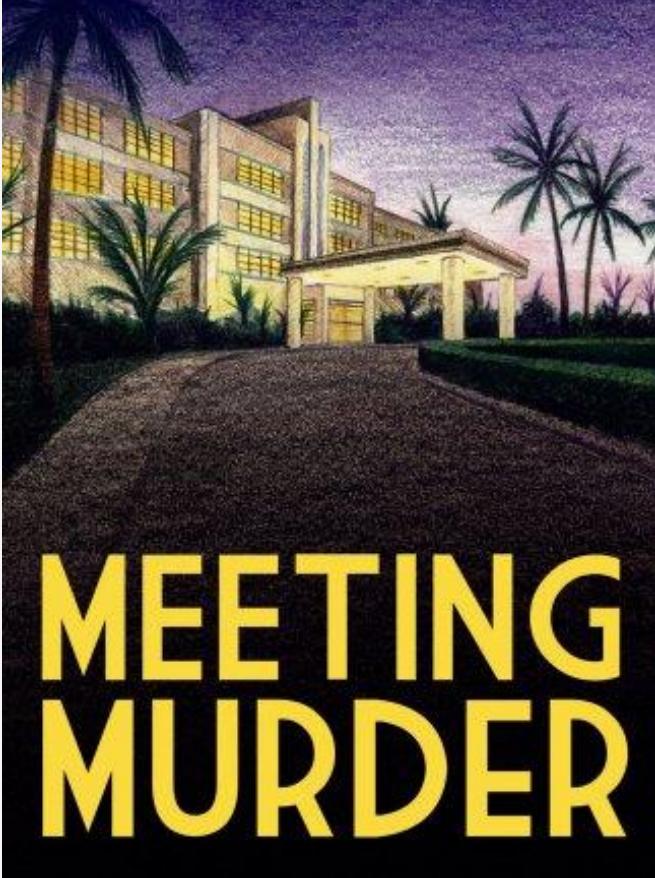
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miro

# The Eisenhower Matrix For Meetings



KATY McDERMOTT



[SIGN IN](#)[NPR SHOP](#)[DONATE](#)[NEWS](#) [CULTURE](#) [MUSIC](#) [PODCASTS & SHOWS](#) [SEARCH](#)

#### BUSINESS

## Shopify deleted 322,000 hours of meetings. Should the rest of us be jealous?

February 15, 2023 · 5:01 AM ET

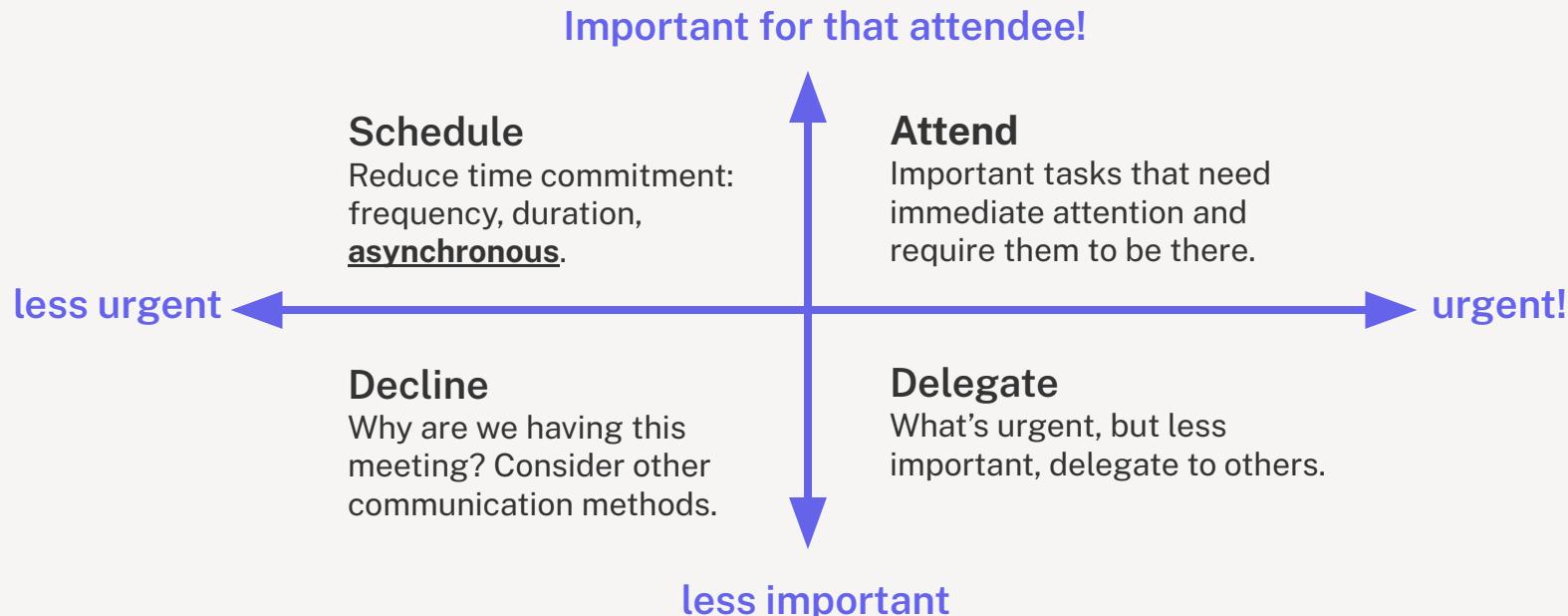
By Andrea Hsu, Stacey Vanek Smith

[5-Minute Listen](#)[+ PLAYLIST](#)

“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



~~SECRET~~

SIMPLE SABOTAGE  
FIELD MANUAL

Strategic Services  
(Provisional)

Prepared under direction of  
The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

~~(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

~~SECRET~~

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Limit the number of attendees **and occurrences**

~~SECRET~~

SIMPLE SAB  
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

to  
and  
ees

3:14 PM · Jun 22, 2023 · 339 Views

Limit the number of attendees **and occurrences**

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~~SECRET~~



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The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

Appointment Recurrence

Appointment time

Start: 2:30 PM

End: 3:00 PM

Duration: 30 minutes

Recurrence pattern

Daily      Recur every  week(s) on:

Weekly       Sunday       Monday       Tuesday       Wednesday

Monthly       Thursday       Friday       Saturday

Yearly

Range of recurrence

Start:  End by:

End after:  occurrences

No end date

Remove Recurrence

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

*and occurrences*

~~SECRET~~



Prepared under direction of  
The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

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



You haven't sent this meeting invitation yet.



To...

Subject

Location

## CHAT

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.



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**



You haven't sent this meeting invitation yet.



To...

Subject

Location

Start time

Wed 6/7/2023



2:00 PM



All day event

End time

Wed 6/7/2023



2:30 PM



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!



You haven't sent this meeting invitation yet.



To...

Subject

Location

Start time

Wed

6/7/2023



2:00 PM

 All day event

End time

Wed

6/7/2023



2:30 PM



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!

~~SECRET~~



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

Have clear & focused objectives in an agenda

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The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~



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The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

(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



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

Alice, Bob, Carol, David, Eve

Subject: RE: [Meeting Name]

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

From: Robert P. Herbig

Sent: [...]

To: [...]

Subject: [Meeting Name]

When: [...]

Where: [...]



To: Alice, Bob, Carol, David, Eve

Cc:

Bcc:

Subject: RE: [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]

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From: Robert P. Herbig

Sent: [...]

To: [...]

Subject: [Meeting Name]

When: [...]



To: Alice, Bob, Carol, David, Eve

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Thanks,  
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From: Robert P. Herbig

Sent: [...]

To: [...]

Subject: [Meeting Name]

When: [...]

~~SECRET~~



Prepared under direction of  
The Director of Strategic Services

~~SECRET~~

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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

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- 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*

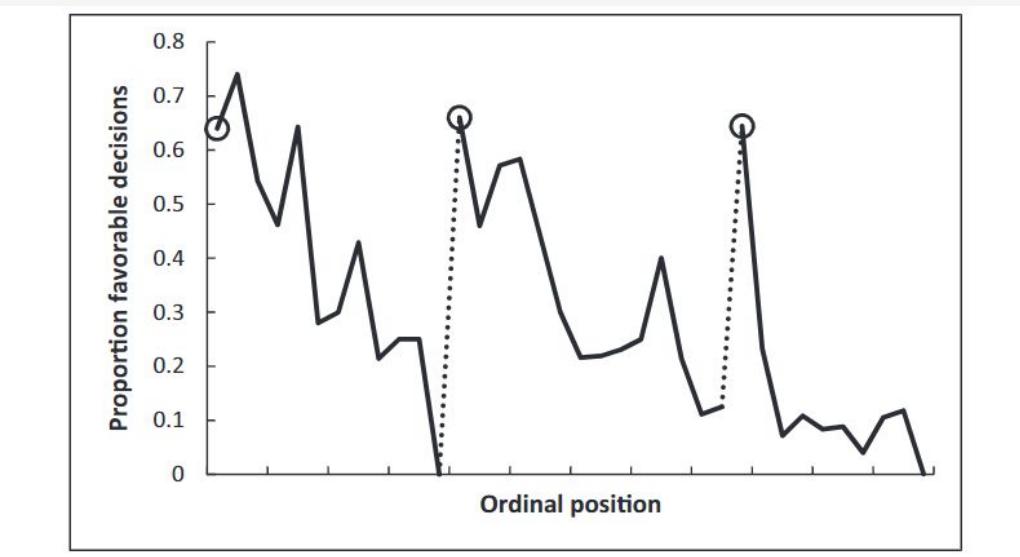
# “How to Make Sure Your Daily Scrum Ends on Time”

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



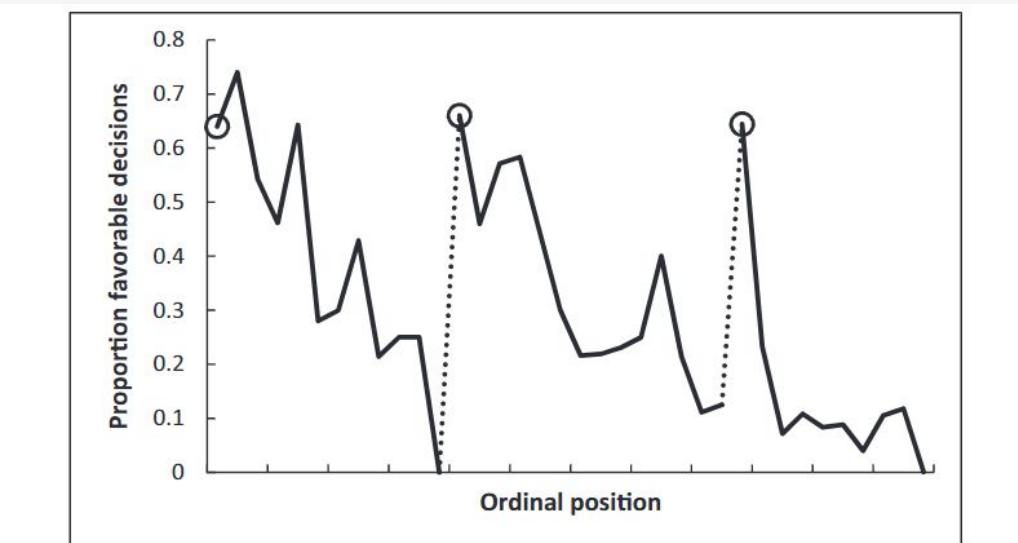


# Consider the environment and logistics



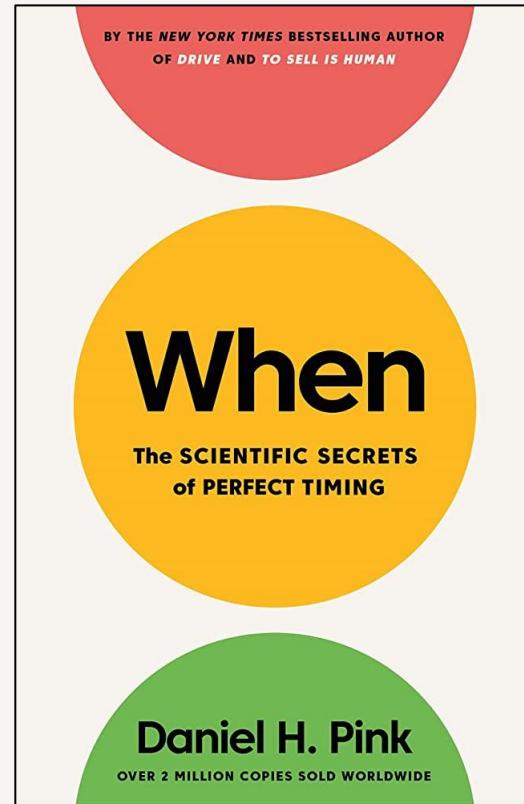
**Fig. 1.** Proportion of rulings in favor of the prisoners by ordinal position.

# Consider the environment and logistics

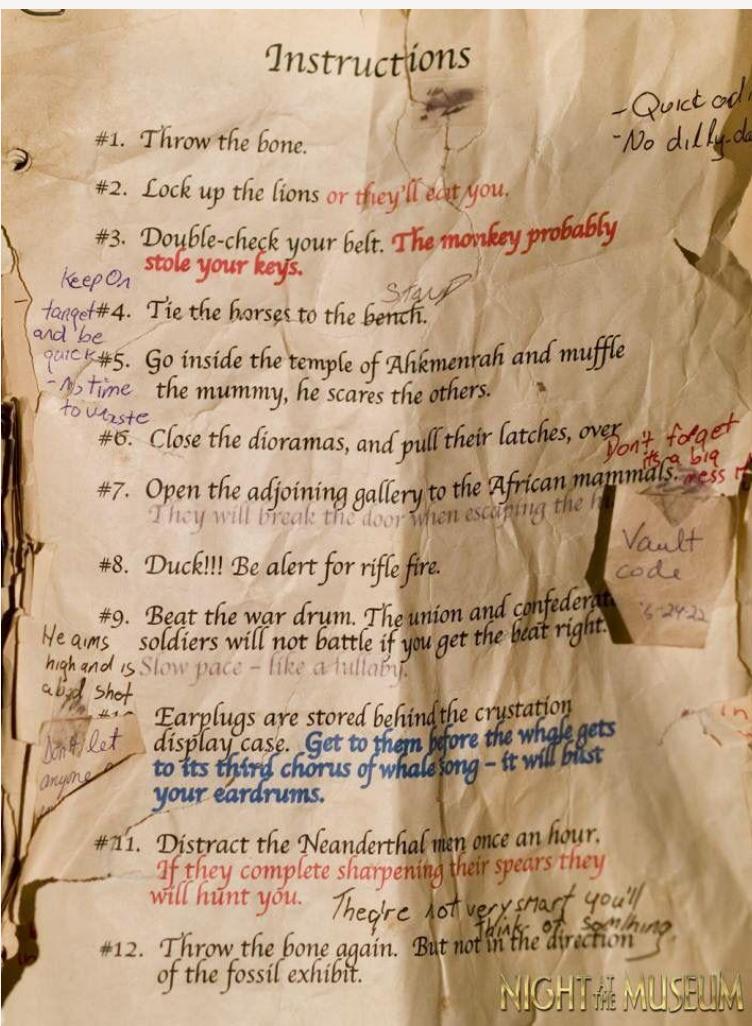
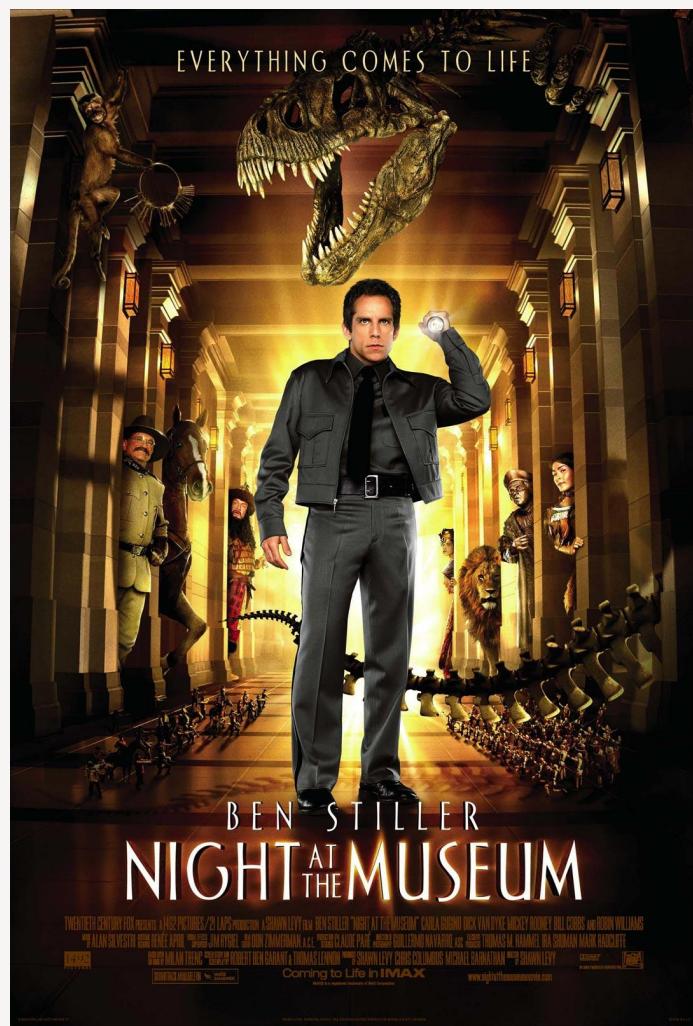


**Fig. 1.** Proportion of rulings in favor of the prisoners by ordinal position. Circled points indicate the first decision in each of the three decision sessions; tick marks on x axis denote every third case; dotted line denotes food break. Because unequal session lengths resulted in a low number of 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



<https://www.amazon.com/When-Daniel-H-Pink/dp/1782119884>



# Meeting Facilitator Checklist

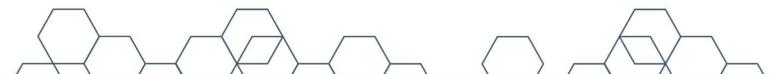


## Guiding Principles

- 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.)



16080 Westfield Blvd. Carmel, IN 46033

317.843.1640 | sep.com

- 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



2



“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

Thursday > Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings

Boost Goal 21/28 Boosts >

Channels & Roles NEW

Welcome >

Community >

# general

# feedback-and-suggestions

# speakers

Sessions-2026 >

tuesday 17

wednesday 11

thursday 12

Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging ...

friday 7

Voice Channels >

general-voice 2:26:50

CraigM

# Escaping the Trap of Self-Sabotaging Meetings

General Session Teams & Collab

January 9, 2026

Alyssa Diaz [Codemash] OP 1/9/26, 4:31PM 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

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# 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