The Ultimate Guide to Awesome Meetings

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Meetings are a great opportunity to sync up, exchange ideas, and make progress. It sounds weird, but meetings can and should be awesome.

The problem is that there are 11 million meetings every day in the U.S. and over half of meetings are unproductive. Oddly, even though meetings are a fundamental part of our work day, most of us haven't been taught or trained on how to run an awesome meeting.

Ultimately, most of us end up winging it.

We created this comprehensive guide to end all of that—to arm everyone with the knowledge they need to run an awesome meeting.

Over the past few years, we've become obsessed with improving meetings, and we've talked with hundreds of managers on how they run meetings and what works for them and what doesn't. This eBook contains everything we've learned on how to improve your meetings and change the culture of meetings at your company.

We'd love to hear what you think!

Walter Chen
Co-Founder of iDoneThis

Jason Shah
Founder of Do.com

iDoneThis Do
do.com

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1. **Introduction**

Why do we continue to have bad meetings? Seriously, 99% of the human population seem to hate them, and there are surveys showing again and again that there are x many meetings everyday that cost gabillions of dollars worth of wasted time and productivity.

Is it some horrible concoction of misplaced optimism that this time it'll be better, resigned acceptance that this is a required dog and pony show — the business world's tradition of dance, monkey, dance — and a massive buildup of bad meeting history that's created such intense inertia that only superheroes can help us pull away into the light?

Imagine that a group of you had to build a doghouse like Snoopy's, and you got a toolbox, some wood, and pencils and paper. Your team is revved up about this cool doghouse, you can envision it, you have all these super useful tools, but all your team does with the pencils and paper is doodle pictures of cute dogs instead of making a blueprint or marking down measurements. Then when you run out of paper, you ask for more paper — only to doodle more pictures of dogs.

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That's how we're treating meetings. Meetings are a helpful tool to decide and plan things. But misused, they're just a bunch of meaningless doodles that don't lead to anything being built and Snoopy with no place to live.

Recently Harvard Business School professor Nancy Koehn talked to NPR's Marketplace about ineffective meetings. The estimates she cited include:

- 11 million meetings every day in the U.S.
- That means 4 billion a year.
- Over 50% of people surveyed said that half the meetings they attend are unproductive.
- That's 2 billion ineffective meetings.

Want more depressing stats?

Kiss your $37 billion goodbye. That's how much unnecessary meetings costs businesses every year according the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics. And most meetings, two-thirds of them to be precise, end before decisions are reached.

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Koehn's explanation for why we keep having fruitless meetings? **Habit**.

Think about it—that's the only way it makes sense that we keep repeating our unhealthy behavior: bad habits are irrational. They're actions you can't justify merely by saying, "well this is how I've been doing it" — just like how you can't make any progress toward losing weight as a goal but keep eating and moving the same as you ever were.

But people overcome bad habits all the time by consistently trying to improve rather than repeat them.

Here's how.

2. How to Ruthlessly Kill Inessential Meetings

When we talked with ShopLocket CEO and co-founder Katherine Hague, she pointed out the importance of noting what kind of work is getting done every day. There's maintenance or even busy work like doing email all day that can trick you into feeling like you've been quite productive. And then there's the work that is "forward-moving for the company", which means you're getting stuff done that really matters.

Palantir's Michael Lopp (Rands) notes then how meetings aren't for discussing things that can be documented like status updates, spreadsheets, or bug reports but for discussing "**what's important, what you care about this week, this month and this year**. What's working and what isn't and what's going to be fixed."

Changing our bad meeting habits means thinking about what about them is moving you forward, what do they address that you actually care about? Let's stop accepting the bizarre notion that it's proper, even responsible, to continue doing something that doesn't actually move your organization or your people forward.

Many meetings are doomed before they begin.

Some may be better done over email, or some could easily be a quick 5 minute chat between 2 people, you name it. Make sure to be mindful about your meeting schedule, whether you are creating or attending the meeting, and don't be afraid to cancel unnecessary meetings.

It's always better to not have a meeting than to have an unproductive, inefficient, redundant one.

2.1. Don't Let the Meeting Schedule Overrun the Creativity Schedule

Create an oasis of quiet by creating boundaries of space and time.
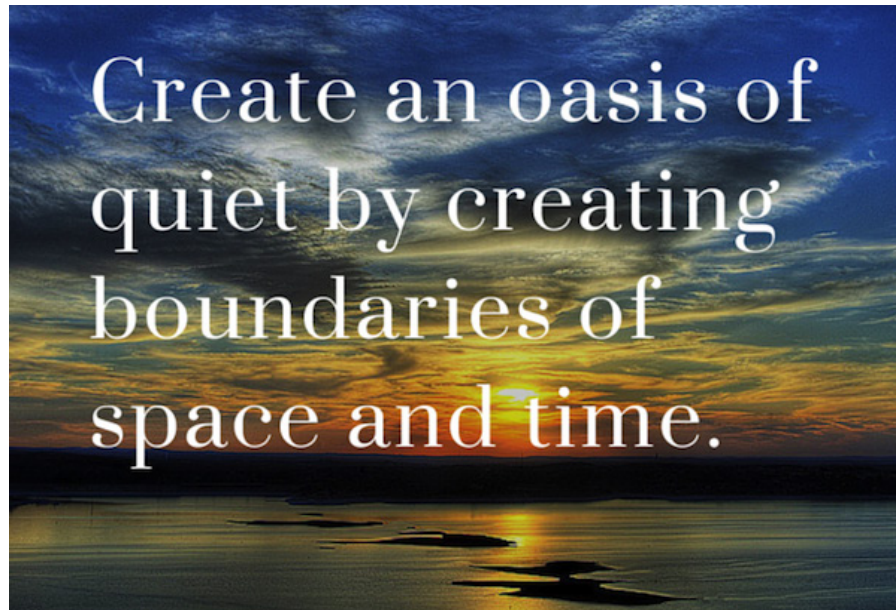
Ira Glass not only hosts the popular public radio show, This American Life, but also writes, edits, performs, produces, and manages. There's plenty of work to keep him busy, which is why he confessed to Lifehacker that his worst habit is that he procrastinates ... by working.

He explains:

In addition to being an editor and writer on my radio show, I'm also the boss, and deal with budgets, personnel stuff, revenue and spending questions, and business decisions... [W]hen I should be writing something for this week's show, I'll procrastinate by looking over some contract or making some business phone call or doing something else that actually isn't as important as writing.

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When you're wearing lots of hats, the temptation to procrastinate by working is high, and it's usually creative priorities and projects that wind up getting the short end of the stick. The double whammy is that not only do you feel guilty and demotivated for not getting to priorities, you also feel worse and burned out from working so much anyway.

In order to reliably get to your creative priorities, the solution is to carve out a deliberate creativity schedule. Without it, the work you put off will be creative work as other tasks seem easier to get through and justifiable, to boot, as part of your job.

Finding an Oasis of Quiet

In his famous essay, Paul Graham lays out the difference between the manager's and the maker's schedule. The manager's schedule will sound familiar to many of you — a day full of meetings, appointments, and coordination — while the maker, or the creative, needs stretches of uninterrupted time in which you can let your mind both wander and focus and get into a flow.

In a 1991 talk, John Cleese describes two different modes of working — open and closed — that track Graham's maker/manager distinction. The closed mode, he explains, is:

> the mode we are in most of the time when we're at work. We have inside us a feeling that there's lots to be done, and we have to get on with it if we have to get through it all... It's a mode in which we're very purposeful and it's a mode in which we can get very stressed and even a bit manic — but not creative.

By contrast, the open mode is less purposeful and more expansive, contemplative, and playful. "It's a mood in which curiosity for its own sake can operate.

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The solution, according to Cleese and Graham, is to fiercely and bravely protect your maker's time with a creativity schedule. For Cleese, the key is to "create an oasis of quiet for ourselves by setting boundaries of space and of time."

A Creativity Schedule Will Set You Free

The rigidity of scheduling and time management seem the very opposite of creative, but it's exactly those clear confines that help you switch modes. For Cleese, that quiet oasis must have specific timetables, proceeding like long, scheduled meetings with yourself:

> It's only be having a specific moment when your space starts and an equally specific moment when your space stops that you can seal yourself off from the everyday closed mode from which we habitually operate.

Researchers writing in the scientific journal, Thinking Skills and Creativity, investigated this exact issue of how time management affects creativity. In their 2009 study, they discovered that creativity correlates positively with regimented features like daily and long-range planning, time management, and perceived control of time. "[C]reative individuals who are able to manage their mental time have a much greater likelihood of meeting their creative goals," the study authors explain.

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Surprisingly, schedules and planning don't add crushing pressure or strangle creativity. Instead, time management allows creative thinking to flourish. With a creativity schedule that provides and protects long stretches of time, you're less likely to procrastinate by working on other things, dealing with your manager's schedule checklist of emails and meetings.

The "Getting Creative Things Done" System

One of the most productive people out there, Cal Newport, has a whole Getting Creative Things Done system, which incorporates many of the time management attributes the creativity researchers found beneficial in their study. This is how it works:

1. **Prioritize**. At the start of the week, decide which creative project you'll focus on that week.
2. **Plan**. Schedule blocks of creative time that are 1-3 hours long in your calendar, and protect that time from interruptions, meetings, and other types of "closed mode" work.
3. **Process.** Think about the journey and process, rather than the destination of your goals. Focusing too much on a particular goal or tick on your to-do list will undo all the freedom and space by adding too much pressure and stress.

Most of us need a balance of both managing and making, but it's far more difficult to stick to a maker's schedule in a manager's world. When we conceive of creative work as a different mode of operation, requiring a shift in mental modes and approach, we can start treating it differently from less important items on our to-do list.

As Cleese reminds us, "Creativity is not a talent. It is not a talent, it is a way of operating."

Images: Knowsphotos (sunset); Wikimedia (Glass).

2.2. How to Cancel Meetings that Shouldn't Happen

Every year, billions of dollars and many hours of productivity are lost in meetings that didn't need to happen. Canceling meetings that shouldn't happen is an important part of maintaining workplace efficiency.

Decision Time: Does the Meeting Need to Happen?

Just because a meeting has been scheduled, that doesn't mean that it should go ahead. It's common for priorities to change and projects to overrun: a meeting scheduled for next Tuesday might actually be more useful if it was pushed back to the following Friday.

If a change in the situation means that a meeting needs to be rescheduled, don't hesitate to cancel the original meeting time. One good habit for planning meetings is to always set an agenda before the meeting takes place. If you can't think of anything to put on the agenda, then that is a good sign that the meeting doesn't need to happen!

Letting People Know

As soon as you have decided to cancel a meeting, let attendees know so they can reallocate the time more usefully. Email is a common way to let people know that a meeting has been canceled, but emails can easily go unnoticed among the high volumes of inbox traffic that most workers experience. A more efficient solution is to use a meeting scheduling service such as Do, which notifies just those individuals that are signed up for the meeting that it has been canceled.

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Audit Your Meetings

Measure how much time is spent on information, updates, logistics, and admin that can be accomplished with other methods and tools versus how much time is actually spent solving problems, collaborative planning, and brainstorming. Does your audience have to be there for the purpose to be fulfilled?

Avoid meetings altogether if your intent is just to circulate information. For example, you can move status updates from standup meetings to asynchronous communication tools. Save meetings for when discussion, interaction, and conversation are needed.

This data will help you make good decisions and persuade others on whether meetings need to take place.

Changing the Culture of Meetings

A meeting scheduling service is an important tool for changing the culture of meetings in the office because it enforces best practices and new processes with software.

Employees can use a service such as [Do.com](Do.com) to quickly see what meetings are taking place, as well as the agenda of each meeting, the outcomes and follow-ups. The software even automatically emails the minutes of the meeting to participants. Treating meetings as useful sessions that have clear agendas, follow-ups and outcomes, rather than simply events that must be attended, can massively improve workplace productivity.

The bottom line is clear: If a meeting doesn't have a clear purpose and isn't likely to produce results, then you need to cancel it! Stop wasting time in meetings that shouldn't happen and reclaim your office's efficiency.

2.3. Case Study: How Mozilla Uses Asynchronous Communication to Cut Meetings

The Mozilla Foundation has a super software team working on projects that range from Popcorn (a video remixing application) to Thimble (an easy-to-use web page maker) to Open Badges (a digital badges system that support learning and achievement).

Developer Jon Buckley talked with us about the struggle to align three teams when Mozilla Foundation wanted to integrate Badges into both Popcorn and Thimble. Combining multiple product worlds could very well collide into chaos and confusing communication, but Mozilla Foundation is seeing smooth sailing.

Status update discussion used to fall to a weekly call, which was time-consuming, while a shared mailing list was only used periodically for such purposes. The Mozilla Foundation teams soon turned to iDoneThis to coordinate communication for people spread across time zones and for cutting across teams. "You don't have to worry about being in the same room at the same time. **That asynchronous nature of updating people is very helpful.**"

After the switch, Mozilla Foundation found that they cut down on a ton of meeting time and used their gatherings for things that required real conversation. "I still find meetings have their place," Jon noted, "but if you don't have to give a status at a meeting because you're using iDoneThis, then that's a way you can save a meeting for this particular problem that we need to tackle. Let us discuss this in person."

Jon is one of our [work-style kindred spirits](#) in his cultivation of time away from the distraction of Things That Constantly Refresh like, IRC, Twitter, and bugmail. He prefers to turn them off and head into one of the smaller conference rooms to work without distraction.

Personally, he has found iDoneThis helpful in broadening his perspective from building software for developers to building for a general audience, because he **gains insight from his UI and UX design teammates**. "If they've been working on mockups, they can post that in their status, so we can get visibility into what they're doing. It's not quite obvious. On our team, we use a bug tracker really heavily, and the UI or the UX designer workflow doesn't fit into that all that well, so it's useful to have a way to see what they're working on that we can comment on."

2.4. Case Study: How SourceNinja Gets an Extra 7 Hours of Productivity Every Week

SourceNinja is a graduate of San Francisco-based startup accelerator AngelPad. It offers worry-free [open source management](#) made simple.

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One of the first lessons of AngelPad that the founder Thomas Korte impressed upon them was to maximize every minute of every meeting, because time spent in meetings has a multiplier effect. **Every meeting costs the number of minutes it takes multiplied by the number of people in the meeting.**

For the SourceNinja team, this used to mean 20 minute standups for their four-member team on a daily basis. 20 minutes five days a week for four people multiplies out to close to 7 hours per week spent in their daily standup.

The guys at SourceNinja love [iDoneThis](#) because it's a time-saving tool. **Instead of spending time in meetings, they're getting stuff done.** Brett, one of SourceNinja's founders, told me that iDoneThis is "the easiest method I've found to have open communication in a team."

That means a lot to us because Brett and his co-founder Matt have been around the block. They worked together at PGP, a startup, and stayed together through PGP's acquisition by Symantec, the largest maker of computer security software. They've gone through many different companies' attempts at solving the hard problem of communication: **how do you stay focused and communicate what you're doing?** Besides standups, they've used wikis, sat in other kinds of meetings, and written weekly email rollups.

iDoneThis succeeds where other methods have failed because it gives visibility into the entire company and provides a record of everything that's getting done, but **it doesn't force people to waste time listening to information that's irrelevant to them**. They've used those extra 7 man hours every week to make incredible progress—like with the Heroku add-on that's launching soon—toward building an awesome product that makes open source easy to manage and rely upon.

2.4. Case Study: Running meetings with Do

Cotap, a San Francisco-based software startup, is a mobile messaging application for teams. Cotap allows users to find and connect with other users who share their corporate email domain.

A constant refrain they were hearing from their team is that they came to meetings unprepared. They felt like the meeting name and list of attendees weren't enough context for them to know what to expect. They tried using the meeting description field, but this wasn't useful for recurring meetings.

> *"We're sometimes able to skip meetings entirely, because we'll find ourselves looking at an empty agenda. That's the best kind of meeting of all."*
>
> -Zack Parker, Co-Founder & CTO, Cotap
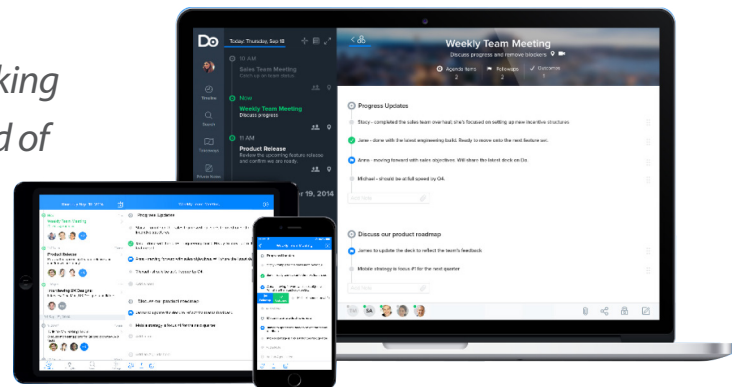
They also tended to have trouble knowing how much time to allocate to individual topics. Oftentimes, people would come into meetings with things they wanted to address, but they'd run out of time before that could happen.

Now, almost all company meetings are run on Do. Their meetings have become more collaborative, and they haven't heard any complaints about people being surprised or unprepared. They do a better job of knowing when to move on to new topics, because they know what the queue of things looks like. People who aren't able to attend meetings often check the notes on Do, so they can get up to speed.

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> *"It's so amazing to have all the notes/follow ups accessible and organized. It's like a change tracker. And beats the hell out of digging through my notebook."*
>
> -Christina Lucey, Head of Product, Cotap

The primary driver of Do usage at Cotap came from the engineering leads. They began using it to organize their own team meetings, and then began to want to use it in other meetings, too. At first, Zack says, "I was reluctant to cede control of the agenda for my weekly meeting with my reports, but I've become a convert." To date, the company has run almost 900 meetings in the last 5 months using Do, and plans to continue using it to ensure their meetings stay on track.

How Do Helps Meetings:

- More collaborative
- No one is unprepared
- No surprises
- Knowing when to move on to new topics
- Meetings can be cancelled entirely, if there's an empty agenda

3. The Essentials of a Well-Run Meeting

Thomas Sowell's observation that "the least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings," while funny, can feel painfully true. But meetings—like any tool—are actually productive when wielded wisely.

The ability to run excellent meetings is a superpower at work. It represents the skill of turning ideas and talking into action and production.

It's easy to follow the bad-meeting trap, because bad meetings tend to feel more like the casual conversations that you're used to. To master running productive meetings, you'll need to learn the following potentially unnatural but absolutely essential rules.

3.1. Before You Begin—Have a Clear Purpose, Make an Agenda, and Make Sure to Engage People Beforehand

OK, you decided the meeting is worth having. Now, what? Your next step should be to make an agenda.

In this agenda, you should outside what the purpose of the meeting is, and which specific agenda items will help you accomplish that. **Without clarity about the meeting's purpose and what you want to discuss, it's very difficult to have a focused conversation that accomplishes anything purposeful or tangible at all.**

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Imagine a meeting where people are prepared and have thought about the problems or discussion topics ahead of time. How novel! Instead, we often find people starting a meeting, asking for basic info that should have already been circulated and understood beforehand. As a result of this, they can hardly contribute anything meaningful.

We waste time catching people up and these individuals end up making impulsive decisions and judgements. To remedy this epidemic, articulate the agenda, ask for feedback, and most importantly, have people thinking and talking about the meeting in advance.

Case Study: Jeff Bezos's Peculiar Management Tool for Self-Discipline

The modern workplace's vogue is informal information exchange. We sit in open floor plan offices so that we can spontaneously collide, chat, and collaborate. The office setup for a meet-cute of ideas can be fizzy and energizing, though when sparks aren't flying, the colliding can be noisy and distracting.

Jeff Bezos takes a totally different approach to management far from that madding crowd. He has a contrarian management technique that's peculiarly old school — **write it down**.

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In senior executive Amazon meetings, before any conversation or discussion begins, everyone sits for 30 minutes in total silence, carefully reading six-page printed memos. Reading together in the meeting guarantees everyone's undivided attention to the issues at hand, b**ut the real magic happens before the meeting ever starts. It happens when the author is *writing* the memo.**

What makes this management trick work is how the medium of the written word forces the author of the memo to really think through what he or she wants to present.

> *"Full sentences are harder to write," [Bezos] says. "They have verbs. The paragraphs have topic sentences. There is no way to write a six-page, narratively structured memo and not have clear thinking."*
>
> *(via [Amazon's Jeff Bezos: The ultimate disrupter - Fortune Management](#))*

In having to write it all down, authors are forced to think out tough questions and formulate clear, persuasive replies, reasoning through the structure and logic in the process.

It makes sense that Amazon executives call these six-page memos "narratives." There's a conflict to be resolved and a story to reach the company's happy endings of solutions, innovation, and happy customers. Specifically, the narrative has four main elements.

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> *[The six-page narratives are structured] like a dissertation defense:*
>
> 1. *the context or question.*
> 2. *approaches to answer the question - by whom, by which method, and their conclusions*
> 3. *how is your attempt at answering the question different or the same from previous approaches*
> 4. *now what? - that is, what's in it for the customer, the company, and how does the answer to the question enable innovation on behalf of the customer?*
>
> *(via [Amazon: How are the 6 page "narratives" structured in Jeff Bezos S-Team meetings? - Quora](#))*

Legendary CEO of Intel, [Andy Grove](#), takes Bezos's view on writing up a notch. Grove considered written reports vital because "the author is forced to be more precise than he might be verbally." In fact, he considered the whole exercise of writing "more of a *medium* of *self-discipline* than a way to communicate information", so much so that his ultimate conviction was that "**writing the report is important; reading it often is not**."

Bezos and Grove's imposition of writing as a medium turns self-discipline and personal reflection into a distributed process. **Reflection is a fundamental way to think through and give yourself** [feedback](#) **on your work**, where feedback can be otherwise rather scarce in the workplace but integral to improving the quality of your thought and action. Encouraging reports to engage in the reflective process of writing helps each and every individual [autonomously](#) work toward becoming a master of their craft.

So reflect and write it down, verbs and all. You'll be better prepared and excited to present, share, collide, collaborate, and lead at work!

Case Study: Why Jeff Weiner Eliminated Presentations in Meetings

LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner also takes a page from Bezos's meeting playbook by starting each meeting with five to ten minutes to read over materials sent out in advance, figuring quite rightly that "just because the material has been sent doesn't mean it will be read." The specific reason behind this quiet reading time is that LinkedIn has eliminated presentations in meetings — no more Powerpoints, no more droning on, no more snoozing while people try to get you up to speed.

Weiner discovered that getting rid of presentations focuses the meeting's contents and shortens its duration, getting to "now what?" much more quickly.

> *With the presentation eliminated, the meeting can now be exclusively focused on generating a valuable discourse: Providing shared context, diving deeper on particularly cogent data and insights, and perhaps most importantly, having a meaningful debate.*

3.2. Punctuality—How to Start on Time

Once a meeting begins late, that immediately sets off the warning alarm - you're already off track. By not being on time, ambiguity is created about when the conversation will actually start and, even worse, a precedent is created for disrespecting the meeting.

Before you know it, the company culture permits starting late and ending late, which undermines any sense of structure or scheduling. It's fine to have a relaxed culture, but people ought to feel like time is valuable and people will stick to what they say they will do.

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Set a Meetings Cadence

geek productivity at work

- how non-geeks think it works
- how it actually works
- sampling points likely to used by non-geeks to get a general picture of how geeks work

effect of a 5-min interruption (or a meeting!)

recovery

5 min

along the day:

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5

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When scheduled indiscriminately, meetings can be supremely disruptive and damaging to your productivity and flow.

Part of what makes meetings so overused is that they seem like an unlimited resource, so **when you start setting and respecting some limitations on their frequency by** designating no meeting days, people's approach and behavior in meetings can click into focus.

Take Twitter and Square co-founder Jack Dorsey. His philosophy is that stress comes from the unexpected so that setting a cadence around your schedule keeps tensions at bay. So Dorsey sets aside Mondays for meetings. So too does Jon Steinberg, president and COO of Buzzfeed, who was inspired by Dorsey to set a meeting cadence. He considers Mondays his "internal meeting day" in addition to deliberately scheduling Tuesdays and Thursdays as "no meeting" days.

The gourmet snack subscription service Love With Food also sets a meeting rhythm. By virtue of its alternating co-location and remote working schedule, the startup limits its meetings to when people are physically in the office every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Because there's a set cadence, founder Aihui Ong notes that **it forces people to be deliberate about scheduling and to maximize the effectiveness of the face-to-face time** they have with each other.
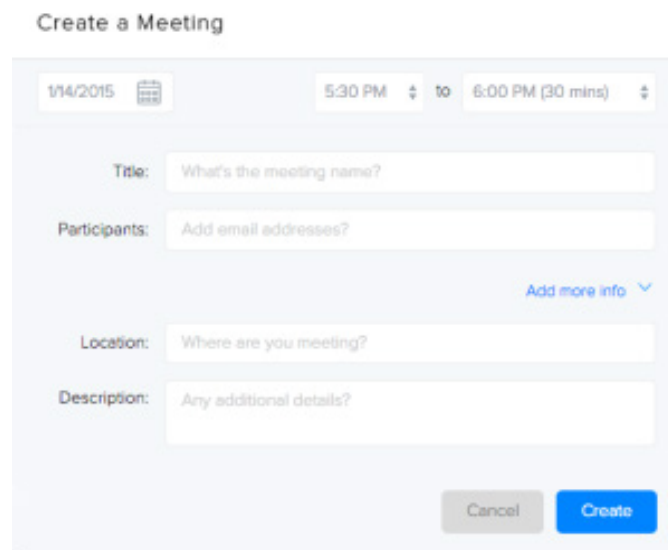
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How to Formally Schedule Meetings

One of the biggest mistakes that you can make in enforcing punctuality is scheduling a meeting verbally or over email only, and then expecting them to show up.

All of our days are incredibly busy - with daily standups, appointments, conference calls, and other meetings cluttering your schedules at work. We use software to keep all of this straight. In short, if a meeting isn't in my Google Calendar, it doesn't exist to me and I won't show up on time, if at all.

That's why it's absolutely vital that you nail down a time for the meeting, then create calendar invites and send them to all of the participants.


If you use Google Calendar, use the "Find a time" feature to easily schedule a meeting time that accommodates all your co-workers' schedules, too.

When you make a new event in Google Calendar (or open an existing one), simply click on the "Find a time" tab. All you have to do is enter the email addresses of the meeting's attendees (you can select up to 20), and their calendars will magically appear on your screen.

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Be resourceful.

A little-known feature of Google Calendar is that it has the ability to not only add guests to a meeting, but resources too. This could be anything from projectors to cables to meeting rooms.
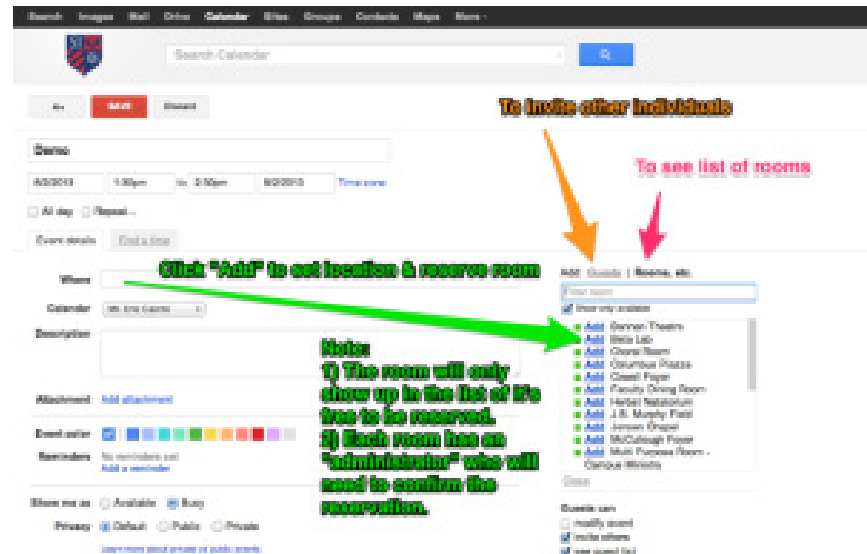
When creating a meeting in Google Calendar, the individual sending out the invite can add resources to the meeting with an easy click.

Simply click on the 'Resources' button, next to the 'Guests' button on the screen which displays the event details. The information on these resources will be included on the invite email, so questions of confusion surrounding meeting locations, rooms, or equipment do not need to be answered. And that means less emails, too!

The bottom line is that you're reducing any potential confusion that can lead to getting the meeting off to a late start.

Case Study: How to Respect Meeting Time and Change the Culture of Lateness

According to Ben Horowitz, founder of famed venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, "venture capitalists in Silicon Valley are notorious for both their tardiness and distractedness." They often end up "show[ing] up to meetings late then spend[ing] the entire meeting on their phones and computers."

This can come off as hugely insulting to startup founders, who may end up declining to accept investment from late and inattentive investors.

The problem is so endemic in Silicon Valley that Horowitz had to take drastic measures to change the culture around disrespecting meetings. They went to extreme measures to combat extreme habitual lateness: At Andreessen Horowitz, you're fined $10 for every minute that you're late.

The change they saw was dramatic: not only did investors show up on time with entrepreneurs, but the firm quickly became regarded by startup founders as the most entrepreneur-friendly firm in Silicon Valley.

3.3. Collaborate—Don't Just Talk

One guy talking the whole time is a meeting that could've happened via memo or video. Better meetings are two-way conversations.

The problem with conversations is that they typically involve "telling," not "showing." "Showing" means taking conversation a step further and making it collaboration. It is easy for coworkers to tune out if you're simply "telling" them things. An easy way to combat this is encourage participation from everyone in the meeting, no matter their role or title.

Rather than describe the change in code that you want to see, collaborate on the same file and actually make the change. Instead of telling everyone what the most recent data says, show them the chart. Send everyone the file, and let them open it on their own screens. That way they can understand the data themselves, and who knows - they may each have different interpretations of it.

Meeting collaboration means getting all of the documents and files in one place, ready to be discussed and manipulated.

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Share the documents and files

During the meeting, you and your team should collaborate in realtime on a meeting canvas.

In order to avoid having to scramble through emails to look for documents, spreadsheets, or presentations, the meeting canvas should contain all relevant files and documents. It should also have the agenda available to all meeting attendees with the ability to add comments and notes to agenda topics. Make sure you share this agenda with the attendees beforehand so that they know *exactly* what will be discussed, before they come in to the meeting. Also ensure that you share the notes / meeting summary afterwards, including to those who were not in attendance, so that everyone is on the same page!
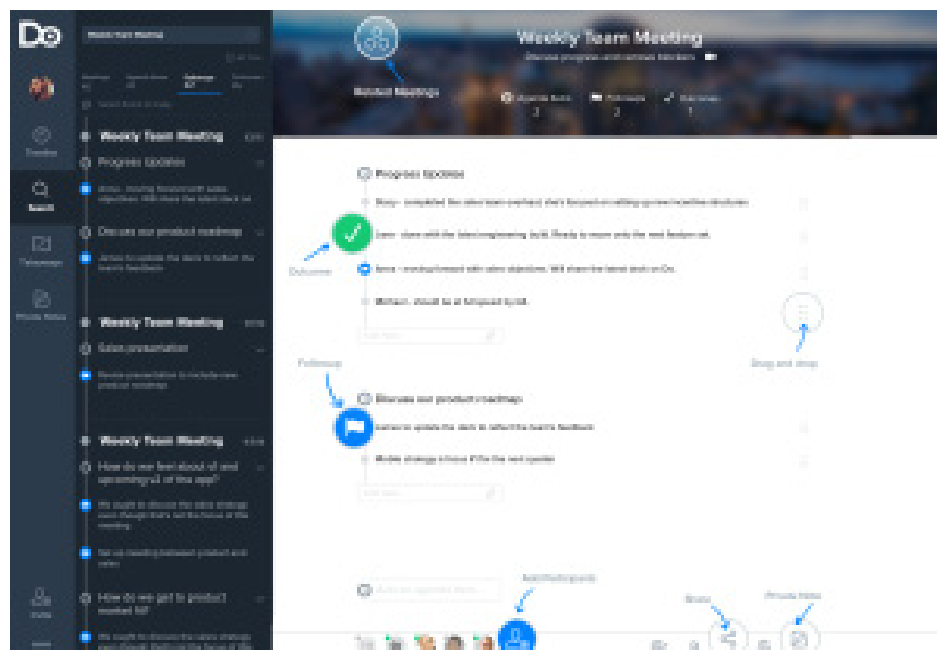

The Do.com meeting canvas

That keeps everyone in the meeting prepared and involved. Your meeting attendees will now be actively engaged, rather than passively listening.

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Finally, the meeting canvas contains all of the artifacts of the meeting that you need to reconstruct its context months later when it's impossible to remember what happened. Easily search across all your past meetings, by agenda titles, notes, or even file names.
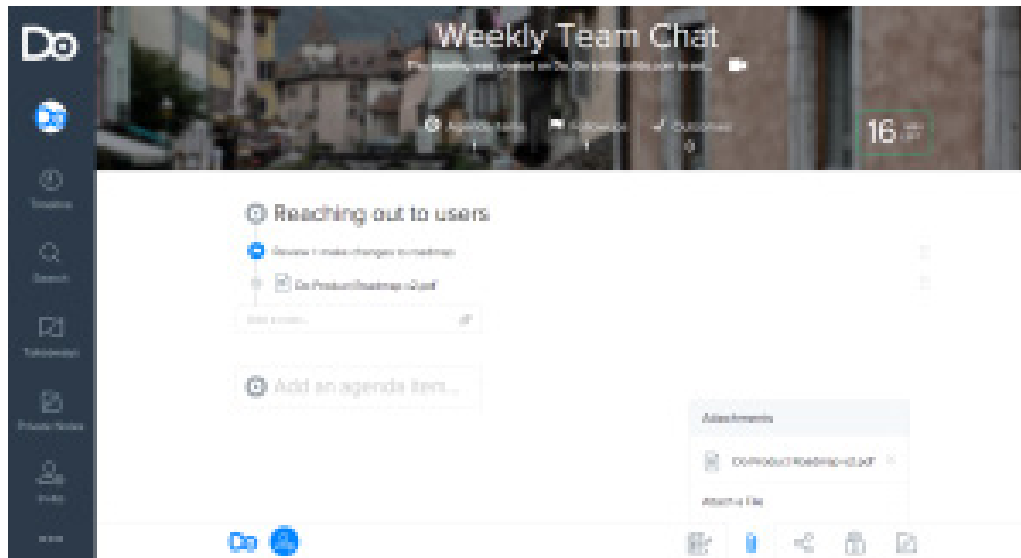
Take private notes

You should also take private notes during a meeting, when you have thoughts you wish to record but to not wish the rest of the team to see. Collaboration is key, but sometimes there's things you simply want to keep to yourself!

3.4. How to End the Meeting

A meeting can go from productive to inefficient if they drag on long after they've outlived their usefulness. Here are techniques to ensure that you're able to end meetings in a no-hassle way.

The meeting is over when the agenda has been achieved

Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg keeps a spiral notebook with discussion points and action items and crosses them out as they're discussed. This display of the process is a shield against tangents or rambling.

> *Her days are a flurry of meetings that she runs with the help of a decidedly undigital spiral-bound notebook. On it, she keeps lists of discussion points and action items. She crosses them off one by one, and once every item on a page is checked, she rips the page off and moves to the next.* ***If every item is done 10 minutes into an hourlong meeting, the meeting is over.***
>
> *(via The 5 Secrets to Sheryl Sandberg's Super Powers)*

Limit distractions—including comfort

Check smartphones at the door or hold your meeting standing up to secure people's attention and focus. Try setups that prevent a kind of classroom environment in which you're sitting at your desk, checked out and not paying attention to the teacher.

This gets everyone focused on dealing with the issues at hand, and then ending the meeting efficiently.

Set time limits

Parkinson's law that "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion" holds true for meetings as well, so limiting that time available will prevent the kind of meeting creep that takes over your schedule.

Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, for example, has [10-minute meeting windows](#) available to book. She's also known for keeping a meeting clock that's visible to the participants. That ensures that meeting participants are mindful of the time being spent. When the allocated time is up, the meeting is over.

3.5. Follow-ups—Document the Key Points and Share Them Afterwards

Beware of the [Rashomon effect.](#) It has the ability to take what felt like a productive meeting and render it totally useless.

The *Rashomon* effect is what happens when different people participating in the same event have different interpretations of what happened in the meeting and what was agreed upon.

That's why follow-ups are vital to getting on the same page after the meeting. You create a record of the meeting that everyone can work off of, and if there are any corrections that need to be made, they can happen soon after the meeting and not down the road when they become more costly.

The Ultimate Guide to Awesome Meetings

Follow-ups or Outcomes

A meeting is essentially useless if the attendees leave being unaware or unclear of what has been done, and what needs to be done.

In order to combat this lack of clarity, be sure to mark every note in your meeting summary as either a *follow-up* or an *outcome*. A follow-up is a to-do, and an outcome is an item that's already been done.
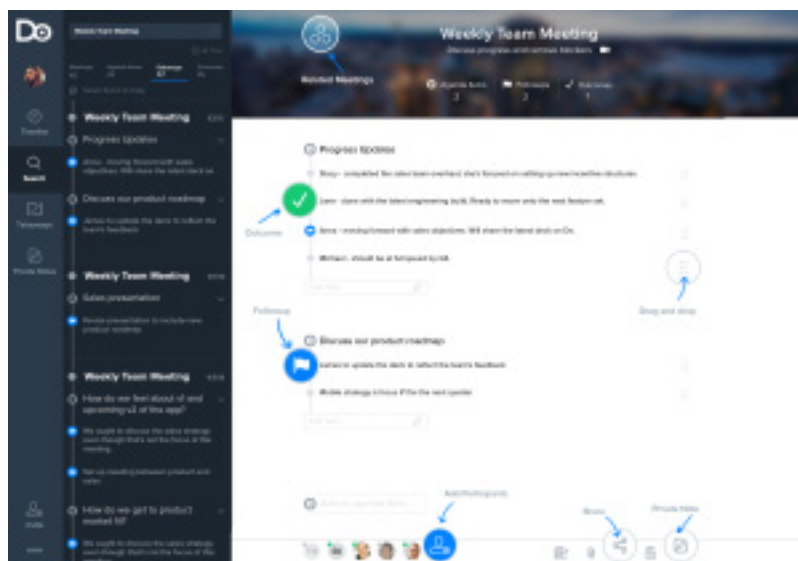
Making this visible distinction in your meeting notes makes it easy for meeting participants to know what steps they need to take next to effectuate what was discussed in the meeting.

Plus, it gives clarity to any observer that wasn't part of the meeting what was discussed at the meeting and what was decided.

Accountability

One of the most integral components to running successful meetings (and to general workplace productivity) is accountability. Clearly assigning who was responsible for what follow-ups and outcomes is essential in providing clarity and ensuring that people are held responsible for what was decided at the meeting.

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[Do](#) helps you with this by allowing you to 'tag' or mention individuals during a meeting. You can tag individuals when composing follow-ups, outcomes, or any other notes - regardless of if they are present in the meeting or not. The individual tagged will get an email notification, letting them know who mentioned them, and what they said, along with a link to the respective meeting page.

Keep the Rest of the Team in the Loop

People want to know that their time was well spent during the meeting. That's why it's absolutely critical to always be sure to jot down what occurred and share with both the participants from the meeting as well as the other people in the rest of the organization.

This helps people understand what was accomplished, promotes an action-oriented culture, and helps people understand what you and your team are up to. Moreover, sharing followups and outcomes with people increases accountability for your next meeting.

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