

# Brief

## For those too busy:

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## We must stop meeting like this: a manifesto for better meetings

There is more than enough data: most meetings are dreadful. We spend 40% of our time in meetings and yet rate over half as ineffective. Organisations have powerful ways to manage money and people, yet do little to manage their most precious resource – time. One study showed the ripple effect of all the meetings set up support of the weekly Executive added up to 300,000 hours a year. Boeing now uses technology to challenge senior managers responsible for having meetings whose number and length go above a ‘budgeted’ ceiling.

We could just abolish meetings. But we are by DNA a social species. Collaboration is essential for success. We meet informally all the time to agree things over a beer, or around the kitchen table. A meeting defines any group, formal or informal: it creates the possibility of performing as a team with big challenges to meet.

### Meetings are more important than ever

So imagine: a world where people knew that every invite was for a meeting that was necessary? That every item on the agenda deserves the group’s attention? That you could decline if your attendance was not essential? That if not invited you could still provide input? That the meeting would be managed to respect your time? We looked at a wide range of evidence and advice to come up with 15 tips for better meetings.

### Manifesto for better meetings

1. **Abolish ‘meeting rooms’:** airless, windowless, officious, depressing - the worst start to a meeting.
2. **Spend twice as much time on the agenda and preparation as normal.** If you haven’t prepared for it, cancel it. The hour you spend preparing is to make the hour spent by 10 people more valuable.
3. **Make the meeting half the length it normally is** (except when you should double its length because there is a really big hairy issue that you should spend hours on).
4. **Stand, drink or stop to finish earlier.** research shows standing meetings are more productive and finish sooner. Flickr’s CEO starts meetings with everyone drinking water and last until the first person goes to the loo. Lenovo lets staff halt meetings that go off-track (as Toyota workers stop assembly lines).
5. **Never have a meeting without a clock:** Google adds pressure with a timer counting down the minutes.
6. **Don’t start a second late,** don’t recap for latecomers (but do welcome them warmly)
7. **Start executive meetings with 10 minutes of silence:** Several CEOs have found it saved time and improved quality as people paused to collect thoughts. Meetings are an experience, not just a process.
8. **Ban technology:** in 22% of meetings everyone sends six emails. Put the phones away, finish early.
9. **Be the servant not the master:** if you are running the meeting. Be a great host - arrive early, stay late, make people welcome. As chair, your self-indulgence or laziness is the biggest barrier to success.
10. **Manage the conversation.** Set up each discussion so everyone knows intended outcomes. Spend the most time on the important things.
11. **70% of the value of meetings is on how you close and how you follow-up**
12. **If you add a meeting, take one away**
13. **It’s not a spectator sport:** don’t invite everyone (Amazon’s Bezos has a rule: no more people than you can feed with 2 pizzas). If you are not going to volunteer for something, don’t go to the meeting. Whether ExCom, big brainstorm or all-staff meeting everyone should be there to do something then or afterwards.
14. **A good meeting is like an Italian family dinner:** said a Reckitt Benkiser CEO. Challenge is good: lots of argument but everyone remains totally loyal to the group afterwards.
15. **Have more meetings with people you don’t normally have meetings with.** Not just anyone – obviously, but to talk about what matters with new people with whom you have shared interests.