

Meetings Are Toxic

Don't have meetings

Do you really need a meeting? Meetings usually arise when a concept isn't clear enough. Instead of resorting to a meeting, try to simplify the concept so you can discuss it quickly via email or IM or Campfire. The goal is to avoid meetings. Every minute you avoid spending in a meeting is a minute you can get real work done instead.

There's nothing more toxic to productivity than a meeting. Here's a few reasons why:

They break your work day into small, incoherent pieces that disrupt your natural workflow

They're usually about words and abstract concepts, not real things (like a piece of code or some interface design)

They usually convey an abysmally small amount of information per minute

They often contain at least one moron that inevitably gets his turn to waste everyone's time with nonsense

They drift off-subject easier than a Chicago cab in heavy snow

They frequently have agendas so vague nobody is really sure what they are about

They require thorough preparation that people rarely do anyway

For those times when you *absolutely must* have a meeting (this should be a rare event), stick to these simple rules:

Set a 30 minute timer. When it rings, meeting's over. Period.

Invite as few people as possible.

Never have a meeting without a clear agenda.

Have fewer meetings

There are too many meetings. Push back on meetings that do not make sense or are unproductive. Only book a meeting when you have an important business issue to discuss and you want or need input, approval, or agreement. Even then, resist the urge to invite everyone and their brother – don't waste people's time unnecessarily.

-Lisa Haneberg, author (from Don't Let Meetings Rule!)

Break it Down

As projects grow, adding people has a diminishing return. One of the most interesting reasons is the increased number of communications channels. Two people can only talk to each other; there's only a single comm path. Three workers have three communications paths; 4 have 6. In fact, the growth of links is exponential...Pretty soon memos and meetings eat up the entire work day.

The solution is clear: break teams into smaller, autonomous and independent units to reduce these communications links.

Similarly, cut programs into smaller units. Since a large part of the problem stems from dependencies (global variables, data passed between functions, shared hardware, etc.), find a way to partition the program to eliminate – or minimize – the dependencies between units.

-The Ganssle Group (from Keep It Small)



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