



WHY 25-MINUTE MEETINGS ARE EASIER THAN YOU THINK

Many of us are time-poor, stressed out, overwhelmed and on the verge of 'death by meetings'. Our calendars are full of irrelevant or tedious back-to-back 'catch-ups' and our email is overloaded with messages screaming for attention.

Every time we get a chance to breathe and catch up on some 'real work', our computers ding! to remind us of another pointless meeting that is starting in five minutes.

Too often I have heard people say that they spend all day in meetings, so their evenings (when they should be with their families,



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Donna McGeorge | *Mentor, Speaker & Author*

friends or enjoying leisure time) are spent doing their actual work or catching up on emails they have missed.

The problem is that we actually need meetings. We need them at work because when they work, they are valuable. Clear actions get set, decisions are made and the whole business moves forward. But what we don't need is for meetings to waste our time, money and resources.

That's where a 25-minute meeting can help. A meeting that is short, sharp and productive. A meeting that gets the job done efficiently. A meeting that gets more value in way less time – seriously.

Are you on autopilot?

The very idea of this might be enough to make you laugh. But just stop for a minute and look at your calendar. How many of your meetings are 60 minutes or more?



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Your team or organisation’s meeting culture is driven by everything from the default setting in your calendar app to how a lack of punctuality is tolerated. Your default mindset is wasting time and draining productivity levels. You are currently running meetings, as you have always done: unconsciously.

When we are on autopilot, we look for excuses and reasons to blame external forces for the lack of engagement in our meetings: company culture, calendars, time, nature of work, projects — the list goes on. We say to ourselves, ‘If only the organisation would ...’ or, ‘It’s management’s fault because ...’

When we become an action hero, we give ourselves permission to take charge of the situation and change those things that don’t serve us. We stop thinking about things that are outside of our control and focus on things that we do have control over.

When you use 25-minute meetings, you go from autopilot to action hero overnight – and it’s easier than you think

Time to get real

Let’s look at a typical meeting scenario. You may show up on time, while others may not. Maybe they (or even you) rock up 10 to 15 minutes late with a few excuses about why others are not coming.

Then the meeting starts with questions about

the agenda that no-one has seen and/or some are disputing. You finally get started on the first item and there is some active discussion that chews up 15 minutes, and you still have a further three items to get through.

So, the remaining agenda items are rushed through before two people stand up and say they need to leave to get to their next meeting, which they are already late for.

That’s 25 minutes of productive meeting at best.

So you are already having 25-minute meetings, but right now, you’re cushioning them with extra fat — that is, a whole bunch of unnecessary time that is pushing them out to 60 minutes.

Our bad meeting habits are costing us:

- » waiting for latecomers: (at least) 5 minutes
- » wondering about the agenda: 5 minutes
- » waffling and going off track: 5 minutes
- » watching mobile phones or PCs: 5 minutes
- » wasting time on fixing tech: 5 minutes.

There’s 25 minutes RIGHT THERE that you could recover if you got rid of bad meeting habits, and I think I’ve been generous with time. We frequently spend more than 5 minutes on some of these things.

Trim the fat

See for yourself. In your next meeting, keep a tally of how many minutes are actually spent being productive. That means taking note of time where there is open discussion and debate, when decisions are made, relevant information is shared and problems are solved.

I believe you will be lucky to make it to 25 minutes. I believe this because I have seen it happen time and time again, in organisations large and small.

Renowned sculptor Michelangelo is reputed to have said that the statue of David was already in the block of marble, so all he had to do was take away the parts that weren’t David: ‘I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free’.

Useful and purposeful meetings are already there in the form of 25 minutes. You just need to chisel away the bits that ‘aren’t David’.

Donna McGeorge is a speaker, author and mentor who helps people make their work work. Using a creative, practical approach, she improves workplace effectiveness while challenging thinking on leadership, productivity and virtual work. ‘The 25-Minute Meeting: Half the Time, Double the Impact’ is published by John Wiley.

www.donnamcgeorge.com