

# **Painfull Meetings? Simple Fixes.**

**Accept the Slow Death of Your Workday  
or Change the System.  
Your Choice.**



# **The High Cost of Bad Meetings. The Evidence is Dismal. You're Not Alone.**

**71% of meetings are unproductive**, meaning they could be improved, reduced, or eliminated.

For a company of 500 people, about **\$10M is the annual cost for unproductive or unneeded meetings.**

Since Covid, the frequency of time in meetings for most companies **has increased by 252%**

**Meeting Recovery Syndrome** - People are unproductive after a bad meeting for 2 - 3 times longer than the meeting itself.

## Why is it so Hard to Fix?

**FOMO Culture:** We attend out of fear, not value, worrying we will miss details that affect our status or workload.

**Accountability Trap:** Group decisions "hide" responsibility; when everyone is responsible, no one is.

**The Habit Gap:** Small tweaks fail because they fight big structural incentives.

*Real change requires structural shifts, not just **better willpower.***

# **Simple, but not Easy Fixes**

11 steps to a better business life based on evidence and experience from companies who have done it.

# 1. Mandatory Agendas and Stated Objectives

*The Rule: No agenda = No meeting.*

**The Requirement:** Share a clear purpose and agenda at least 24 hours in advance.

**The Result:** Participants arrive prepared, knowing exactly what needs to be achieved.

*This single change is the most effective way to slash meeting quantity and duration according to the companies that have done it successfully*

## 2. Agendas as Specific Questions

**Specific Inquiry:** Write agenda items as specific questions to be answered.

**Decision Focus:** Ensures every attendee knows exactly what is being decided.

**Measurable Impact:** Allows you to objectively track if the meeting achieved its goal.

*Frame the problem as a question  
to drive a concrete answer.*

### 3. No-Meeting Days: The 2:3 Sweet Spot

**No-Meeting Days:** Evidence suggests three meeting-free days per week for peak productivity.

**The Balance:** Two days for synchronous meetings; three days for deep, focused work.

**The Caveat:** These days only work if you change behaviours on the remaining two meeting days.

*Protect your deep work by consolidating meetings into a 2-day window.*

## 4. Post-meeting Ratings

**Scorecard:** Every participant rates every meeting usefulness on a scale of 1–10. Automate this in your calendar system.

**Transparency:** Share ratings publicly and take action to address low scores.

**Cultural Signal:** Proves to the organization that their time is a respected asset.

*What gets measured gets improved -  
feedback kills bad meeting habits*

## 5. Reduce Default Duration

**New Norm:** Set the calendar default to 30 minutes (or even 20) instead of 60.

**Monitor Deviations:** Exceptions to the 30-minute rule should be limited to no more than 20% of meetings.

**Efficiency:** Smaller windows force faster decisions and tighter focus.

*Work expands to fill the time available; shrink the window to increase the pace.*

## 6. The Rule of 5

**Small Circles:** Limit recurring meetings to no more than 5 essential people.

**Contribution Rule:** If you aren't contributing, you aren't needed. No passive attendees.

**Functional Lean:** Only one person per functional team for cross-functional decisions.

*Be brutal with the guest list to keep discussions high-stakes and high-value*

## 7. Async-First for Decisions

**The 3-Decision Rule:** No meeting is called unless there are at least three decisions to make.

**Pre-Work:** Recommendations and rationale must be shared and reviewed async first.

**Auto-Cancel:** If a decision can be reached in the async phase, cancel the meeting.

*Only use live time for dialogue that cannot happen in writing.*

## 8. Large Scale Time Blocking.

**Meeting Sabbaticals:** Block **one full week** per quarter with zero meetings.

**The Reset:** Consider "blank sheet" months where all meetings are canceled to evaluate what is actually necessary.

**Efficiency Gains:** Companies using this have seen up to 35% meeting reductions.

*Radical pauses allow you to see which meetings are essential and which are just noise.*

## 9. The Clean Slate Approach.

**Wipe the Calendar:** Don't "prune" existing meetings; delete them all and rebuild from scratch.

**New Requirements:** Only rebuild using the new rules (30-min default, 5-person max, etc.).

**Communication:** Gather feedback first, then swing the pendulum fully to the new norm.

*Incrementalism fails; a "blank sheet" is the only way to reset meeting culture.*

## 10. Intentional Communication Design.

**Status Updates:** Use async written updates or shared dashboards.

**Live Syncs:** Only for decisions requiring real-time, sensitive dialogue.

**Physical Presence:** Use office days for trust-building and spontaneous problem-solving.

**Remote Focus:** Reserve remote days exclusively for deep, uninterrupted work.

*Choose the medium that fits the goal,  
not just the easiest default.*

## 11. Calculate & Share the Cost.

**The Math:** A 1-hour meeting with 5 people costs roughly €250 - €500 in fully loaded salary.

**The "Recovery" Factor:** Including "Meeting Recovery Syndrome," that cost jumps to €500 - €1500.

**Visual Check:** We wouldn't expense a €500 dinner without thought - don't call a meeting without it either.

*Treat time like budget; if you wouldn't spend the cash, don't spend the minutes.*

# Client Meetings

These are different, but not “uncontrollable”, just a different negotiation context. It’s not that you don’t have control, it’s that you don’t have established norms.

1. Proactive async updates
2. Live Dashboards
3. Agree and align on meeting cadence
4. Faciliate client meetings, not just attend
5. Understand each client’s meeting drivers
6. Share your own meeting improvement activities & results

# What Doesn't Work

(based on evidence)

- Meeting-effectiveness workshops and training (improves individual meetings briefly, doesn't change culture.)
- Sending guidelines or best-practice documents
- Asking individuals to voluntarily decline meetings
- Pruning the calendar meeting-by-meeting

# You Have Two Choices

## **Continue the pain.**

Keep losing time, money and efficiency with an ineffective and a painful meeting culture.

## **Swign the pendulum.**

Implement some or all of these suggestions taken from successful real-world experiences.

*If you need help making these suggestions specific or customized to your organization, reach out.*

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