

## Read this before Our Next Meeting

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- 1. Traditional meetings create a culture of compromise.
- 2. Traditional meetings kill our sense of urgency.
- Instead of a meeting structure that demands that we make and defend strong decisions, the broken meeting system we've adopted enables us to pass off responsibility too easily.
- But alas, our traditional meetings kill game-changing ideas. When a revolutionary idea is brought into our meetings (and many have been), no one takes ownership. The bystander effect takes over. As if we were witnessing a petty crime on a street filled with other onlookers, we feel little pressure to take action. After all, as we sit in our safe conference room, it's hard not to assume that the responsibility should be shared by everyone. The table is round, there's a sense of egalitarian fairness, and we assume that we're all in this together. But that diffusion of responsibility is what sabotages our hopes for innovation.

### Traditional Meetings Kill Our Sense of Urgency

- When did we lose our fire? When did we get so comfortable? I used to come into work with a promise to myself, a commitment to do work that matters. But having been unsuccessful in fulfilling that promise in the short windows between meetings, I now come into work with the hope of surviving the day.
- I wonder when we'll realize what a trap we've set for ourselves. Regularly interrupting the day to bring our best minds together to focus on the urgent makes it impossible for these people to spend their focused energy on what's actually important.
- David Heinemer Hansson, from *37 Signals*, says meetings are toxic because they break workdays into a series of work moments. Achieving flow, the state in which we do our best work, can take long periods of focus. Interruptions force us to start over each time.
- Meetings called because it's difficult to capture everything we want to say effectively in writing, quickly. These meetings rarely add any more value than a memo would have. In fact, they're worse because in addition to wasting time, they rely on nonverbal communication that's hard to refer to later on.
- Meetings need to be less like the endless commercial breaks during a football game, and more like pit stops at the Daytona 500. Sure, even these stops slow momentum, but not for long, and only in service of winning. Quick high-energy transactions to refuel, to change the tires. To allow the driver to do the work better and faster—that's the type of meeting that people will walk away from with a continued sense of urgency and energized with a feeling of aliveness.
- Maybe even more unsettling than the false-urgency problem is that meetings have become a tool to delay decisions. They have become our default stalling tactic.
- The Modern Meeting is a special instrument, a sacred tool that exists for only one reason: to support decisions.

## The Seven Principles of Modern Meetings

1. The Modern Meeting supports a decision that has already been made.
2. The Modern Meeting moves fast and ends on schedule.
3. The Modern Meeting limits the number of attendees.
4. The Modern Meeting rejects the unprepared.
5. The Modern Meeting produces committed action plans.
6. The Modern Meeting refuses to be informational. Reading memos is mandatory.
7. The Modern Meeting works only alongside a culture of brainstorming.

The Modern Meeting convenes to support a decision that has already been made.

- Our organization is experiencing a decision deficit. We run into the constant trap of over-planning. We have a cycle of never-ending due diligence. We should gather only as much input and advice from others as is necessary to make our decision. After all, decisions are the job of the individual.
- Modern Meetings can't exist without a decision to support. Not a question to discuss—a decision.
- This principle will stop the over-planning and mass interruption that occur so often. With one click of a button, the decision maker disrupts seven people's schedules for one hour, just to help make a decision. The Modern Meeting won't allow it.
- If you need my input pre-decision, you'll have to get it from me personally. We'll have a conversation. Less convenient for you, but that's the point. You're the one with the looming decision to make, not me.
- If the decision is controversial, get buy-in from the group (via one-on-one conversations) before you make your decision. If we still have serious objections or better alternatives, or we want to propose changes to the details of the decision, the Modern Meeting is the forum for debating them. In the end, though, you make the decision; you own the outcome.
- The benefits that quick decisions bring are boundless. Sometimes it just takes the conviction, the competence, and the guts to make them.
- Conflict: The individual should own her decisions and champion them strongly, but in our organization we must be open to input from others. We should be resolute, without being stubborn. Conflicting opinions spur debate that can open the door to intelligent decisions. The Modern Meeting welcomes conflict. After a preliminary decision is made, if there are differing opinions or serious objections, the Modern Meeting gets them all out on the table to be considered.
- In traditional meetings, individuals may hesitate to voice their true opinions or edgy ideas for fear of criticism. They may think: Is it the right time to dissent?
- The Modern Meeting meets only for the purpose of dissent. Conflict is expected, so participants feel safe to let their ideas fly indiscriminately. One caveat: Upon making a decision, if you're not willing to alter it or modify it in any way, don't bother having a Modern Meeting. Just go.
- Conflict is useless unless you, the decision maker, come to the table with an open mind. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't be confident in your decision, nor should you easily compromise, but you should! Be moveable. Otherwise, don't call a meeting. Make the decision, send a memo, and be done with it.

- Coordination: Decisions can lead to profound action, but that action happens only with proper coordination.
- Once a decision is reached, sometimes the resulting action is straightforward. The division of labor is clear; the intersections between teams and departments are obvious. No
- Need to have a meeting. Other times, the scenarios are tricky, the steps are vague. It's worth having a Modern Meeting to engage in collaborative problem solving. Getting smart people in a room to figure out how to support a plan or launch a product makes sense.
- Every meeting should require pre-meeting work. Any information for getting attendees up to speed should be given out beforehand. If the attendee doesn't have time to read and prepare, she doesn't have time to attend.
- Of course, we'll all have to agree on a pact: we'll cancel the informational meetings, but you must commit to reading the memos.
- This means that the internal dialogue about avoiding risk is particularly lousy when you ask responsible parties to brainstorm. After all, they're the ones who will be held responsible for executing what they just dreamed up. In every brainstorming session I've attended, the untrained participants are easily identified. They start to speak up, then realize that they might have to live with what they propose or that they might be criticized, and hey, it's easier to just listen.