

Incredible Meetings

Transform Your Meetings and Your Culture

Meetings are a ubiquitous part of work culture.

They are so common that we often describe them as what we accomplished at the end of our days (rather than the decisions, deliberation, or work product achieved at them). "I had three back-to-back meetings this morning."

The fact that meetings are so common means we spend hours of our lives in them. And yet, for many people, meetings feel frustrating.

- There are too many.
- They aren't efficient or effective.
- They eat up time when real work could be done.

When meetings feel like a source of frustration rather than elation, there are two main causes. These happen innocently and unconsciously . . . but ***to prevent pitfalls, we have to be aware of them.***

Pitfall One: Meetings are used inappropriately

- In many team and company cultures, meetings become a default tactic for moving work along and making decisions. If it's unclear what to do next, scheduling a meeting can remove the pressure of making a decision. This results in many meetings on the calendar that could have been handled by fewer people or could have been prevented by an earlier decision.
- In some companies, having a full calendar of meetings feels more comfortable than the nitty-gritty challenging work that could move the dial on impact. Meetings become a way to (often unconsciously) avoid the hard stuff — projects that push us or feel confusing, overwhelming, or ambiguous.

Pitfall Two: Meetings aren't owned thoroughly

- Facilitators don't understand or own their roles (most people aren't trained to be good meeting facilitators, but many roles require facilitation).
- Participants are passive or distracted rather than present and engaged. Or they don't know how to participate in other ways, like taking up too much space or air time.
- Decision-making, input, and authority are unclear.

Meetings reinforce in your culture what you put into them. Great meetings support your company's values, mission, and goals. And there is a simple way to make them effective, efficient, and exceptional.



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It only takes a small amount of momentum to get meeting culture moving in a great direction. And individual commitment will take you most of the way. So if you're personally ready to make meetings great, boom. Start on your team, or in your current one-on-one meetings.

This guide is a framework for efficient, impactful, on-target meetings. It is infinitely customizable — apply, adapt, and add based on your team or company.

Great Meetings Have Three Things in Common

✓ Clear outcomes

✓ Shared methods
+ standards

✓ Clear + well-
executed roles

Let's explore each of these in detail. As we go, you'll develop plans, apply what you learn, and track your action steps.

GREAT MEETINGS, STEP ONE | Clear Outcomes

Without a purpose or goal, it's impossible to have an effective meeting. Outcomes are measurable end results that usually describe changes in the attitude, skill, or knowledge (ASK) of the people involved in an event. (There are other kinds of results — decisions, amounts of money, etc. — which might be outcomes, but usually, these have a human component, as you'll see below.)

Another way to think about this is that an outcome describes *what will be different at the end of a meeting.*

Meetings aren't outcomes. They are tactics or methods to support outcomes. These outcomes might be your team or company goals, operational standards, vision, or values.

A weekly team meeting, for example, might have the following outcomes (look for *Attitude, Skill, and Knowledge*):

- team feels connected—to each other, to the company mission, to goals
- team understands performance: progress toward goals + resulting changes to tactics
- team feels ownership of work and success; they feel empowered to give input, raise concerns, and take ownership of work
- team experiences meetings as valuable, both in content and time spent

And each specific meeting (or agenda item) has at least one outcome. For example:

- team knows the date of next week's project launch, and their responsibilities in making the launch happen.



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Your Turn: Using a meeting of your choice, set outcomes. What changes in attitude skill or knowledge will take place in participants? What are the measurable work product results? What is the team's assignment?

GREAT MEETINGS, STEP TWO | Shared Methods + Standards

Once you've set clear goals, it's time to decide on standards. Each standard should directly serve one or more of your meeting or (meeting culture) outcomes.

Below are sample company-wide meeting standards. If you'd like a scorecard to use as a basis for creating a meeting improvement action plan give your team/company a 0-4 rating on each item below.

0 = Never; 1 = Infrequent; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Regular; 4 = Consistent

- Meetings are not a solution, but a tool used only when appropriate to meet a clear outcome; anyone is empowered to question the need for a meeting
- Bias toward efficiency and precision in scheduling + conducting
- Commitment to total preparedness + engagement of participants and facilitators (laptops + phones are used only for note taking + only if necessary)
- Start, proceed, and end on time, unambiguously and no matter what
- Only appropriate agenda items: relevant to the entire group, timely, vetted in advance if necessary
- Deference to the agenda + outcomes
- Solution orientation: if you put an item on the agenda, please arrive with an idea or specific request from the group, rather than with a problem
- Communicate notes, decisions, and action steps to those not present

Your Turn: Set methods for your example meeting above. Then, using this list as a starting point, decide on your team or company's shared methods + standards.

GREAT MEETINGS, STEP THREE | Clear + Well-Executed Roles

Roles have to be known and owned for meetings to be successful. In this step, we'll look at multiple roles, and the ownership of each, starting with the meeting Facilitator.

3.1 Ownership of the Facilitator Role

Facilitation is often treated as a task, a single item. Thinking of facilitation instead as a position description—a role with multiple components—helps us approach the role thoughtfully. And thoughtful facilitation approached with ownership, is a key to great meetings and meeting culture.



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The facilitator role, or position description, extends beyond the meeting; facilitators have responsibilities before, during, and after the meeting:

Before

- Establish or understand outcomes
- Create an agenda or assign its creation
- Decide on appropriate participants + set clear roles
- Establish tone: people, places + things — room setup, rehearsal, tech check, remote participants
- Prepare participants in advance: agenda, materials, etc.

During

- Set the tone + lead the meeting
- Set or remind participants of ground rules and model them
- Keep the meeting on task
- Keep track of calling on people
- Focus on the needs of the group, not personal needs
- Monitor the fairness and tone of the discussion
- Facilitate the creation of action items, assignments, and deadlines
- Facilitate resetting of space (if applicable)
- Teach others how to facilitate

After

- Send follow-up to participants (action items, next steps)
- Move action items forward + follow through
- Set + communicate future meeting dates

Your Turn: Create a facilitation action list. It could include a role commitment statement, placing facilitation prep time on your calendar, and/or reviewing the facilitator role with your team at your next meeting. Start from wherever you are—if you've got nothing in place, perfect, start there. If you've got facilitation on lock, look for an opportunity to dial it up.



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3.2 Personal Ownership & Preparedness

Great participation makes meeting culture better. Like facilitation, this is a role, not a task, with responsibilities before, during, and after the meeting.

Before

- Understand outcomes and role
- Review agenda and materials sent in advance; reflect or take notes

During

- Arrive on time and ready to work
- Participate + engage fully
- Focus on the needs of the group and the agenda
- Conscious use of self + voice
- Follow all ground rules

After

- Move action items forward + follow through

This role is so important. Participating well can influence an entire team or even the direction of a company. In addition to being a great participant when all goes well, sending an email to the facilitator in advance of a meeting when you haven't received an agenda, or asking clarifying questions about outcomes or objectives while in a meeting, helps others rise to your standard of participation.

Your Turn: *How will you interact with and prepare for meetings you don't facilitate? What kind of participant do you want to be?*

3.3 Decision Making & Power Structure

We've discussed outcomes, including a clear and understood assignment for meeting participants. Similarly, leadership and decision-making should be clear within your team or company, and within individual meetings.

Who's in charge of meetings? The facilitator, or the "highest ranking" participant? How often have you seen a meeting start late or take a turn because the people in the room defer to someone with a bigger title? Clarity makes this a no-brainer instead of a time waster. For example, adopting a company-wide practice, ***"Facilitators are empowered to lead meetings. They start, proceed, and redirect as they see fit to serve meeting outcomes, follow ground rules and adopted standards, and meet the group's needs."***



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Similarly, each participant's role at a meeting, or within a specific topic, needs to be clear. Very specifically, total clarity about who decides is essential. Team members need to know if they're giving input, making a recommendation, or if they have more weight in the result. The RAPID (which stands for: Recommend, Agree, Perform, Input, Decide) decision-making model provides a simple way to think about this. It's all over the internet. Have a ball.

Your Turn: *What is your leadership structure when it comes to meetings? Who's accountable? After answering, using your example meeting above, think about role clarity. What is each participant's role? Does everyone know what their role is? If not, how will you make it clear?*

3.4 The Right Participants

Your list of invitees is a method to support your meeting outcomes. Priya Parker, who wrote the exceptional book *The Art of Gathering*, calls this a "purpose-driven list."

Too few people (or the wrong people) gives you little chance of success because "a decision can't be made without the right people in the room. Too many people—especially those without decision-making power or those who will get more out of the conversation than they contribute—dilutes the power of the meeting, and potentially the potency of the result. Having the right people in the room, and doing the sometimes hard work of getting others to attend or telling them they can't, is essential."

Meetings with too many — and too few — people waste time. And wasting people's time on a regular basis erodes your team and/or company culture.

Your Turn: *Think of a recent meeting that had the wrong participants. Were you one of them? Identify one meeting that needs a participant tune-up and fix it.*

Meetings reinforce in your culture what you put into them. This guide is only the beginning. Now it's your turn — make the meeting culture you envision

Resources + Staying in Touch



Visit mimigordon.com for classes + other resources, to schedule a company workshop or speaking engagement, or to talk about working with me as your coach.



Recommended books about effective meetings:

- *Holacracy* by Brian J. Robertson (and the Holacracy website)
- *The Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker

