



Stop Wasting Time: Use These 3 Characteristics of Mindful Meetings

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I hesitate to think how many meetings I've attended throughout the years.

I also want to avoid thinking about how much of that time was wasted by having to listen to posturing, unrelated obsessions, and arguments based on uncorrected misunderstandings.

Okay, now I'm thinking about them and it is not making me happy. Likely you can relate. Let me think instead about those meetings that worked; the meetings that were productive and accomplished what could not have been achieved without them. That pleases me.

Let me suggest 3 characteristics that distinguish the useful meetings from the rest:

1. Everyone attending was convinced that nothing on the agenda could be addressed without the meeting. Most things don't require meetings — email will do. Pretending to need people's input does not require a meeting; just announce the decision that's already been made. No one has illusions about that — we all see the results of past discussions.

But some things require human interaction and collaborative thinking. Like problems we don't have solutions to yet or conflicts that have not been fully explored. *If we need to take time to let creative solutions emerge, a meeting may be needed.*

2. Everyone necessary was fully there. That's saying a lot. How many meetings are you part of where others are invested in their smart phones, checking in to the meeting

only every so often? Or where some members only perk up to really listen when the boss speaks?

Most of the meetings I lead don't need all the time allotted to them because we make sure everyone is attending. I mean "attending" in the sense of paying attention, not sending their bodies as proxy for their minds. This is not accomplished by nagging (no matter how much fun it is to pull the moral superiority card). *It is accomplished by agendas that focus on decisions that make a difference.*

3. Agreement had been achieved on what we'll accomplish and the kinds of conversations we'll use to get results. What will the deliverables be? Information sharing? Traffic management? Decisions? Preliminary decisions for further research? Decide so we're all going to work toward delivering what we owe each other? What kind of conversations? Issues that we need to explore or conclude? An agenda should include what is needed from each item and it needs to be out in advance so decisions can be made in a timely way. There's no excuse for people hearing about something for the first time at a meeting. *And there's no excuse for expecting a decision when the proper amount of preparation hasn't been offered.*

There are more things to cover, but this is enough to start.

I think my next campaign is to abolish regular meetings — they are the most convincing proof of the old saying that the work expands to fill the space available.

The best meetings are scheduled when there's an urgent need to avoid panic by figuring stuff out while there's still time to make it great. In other words, great meetings are not only pointed at getting things done, but at creating an atmosphere of reflection, focus, and collaboration. They deal with the current need *and* they create the conditions for further development of a sense of community and common purpose. If your meetings do that, you're well on your way.

Source: <https://www.ccl.org/blog/stop-wasting-time-use-3-characteristics-mindful-meetings/>