

How to Avoid Death by Meeting

Written by Mark Batterson

Seven ways to take the “bored” out of the boardroom.



I don't like meetings. I never have, and I probably never will. Maybe it's my personality. Maybe it's ADD. Maybe it's the fact that I'd rather be running around doing things than sitting around talking about things.

I've sat through meetings that would bore a sloth. I've experienced counter-productive meetings that create more problems than they solve. And who hasn't endured a mid-afternoon meeting with a monotone speaker. It's death by meeting! I'm just not a meeting person. The problem is this: meetings are an inevitable part of ministry. I have staff meetings and planning meetings. I have financial meetings with our stewardship team, brainstorming meetings with our creative team and counseling meetings with engaged couples. Throw in a litany of non-church meetings and sometimes I feel like throwing in the towel.

But I've also learned to appreciate a well-planned, well-run meeting. There is nothing like a meeting with lots of energy and synergy.

Let me share seven lessons I've learned about maximizing meetings:

1. Designate certain days of the week as meeting days.

I schedule all of my meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I schedule as many as I can. I'm in meeting mode all day long. Those are long days that can be physically and emotionally draining, but the payoff is that Mondays and Fridays function as study or vision days. I dress down, kick back and have time to write, think, dream, study or read.

It doesn't matter what days you choose as your meeting days. The key is finding a rhythm that works for you.

I learned a lesson a few years into pastoring: don't revolve your life around other people's schedules. If I schedule my life around other people I'm going to live in constant chaos. I know it

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sounds harsh. I know it sounds selfish. But I expect people who want to meet with me to reorder their schedules.

Most people want to meet in the evening. But I have three children, and I don't apologize for the fact that they are my top priority. I'm coaching basketball. I'm quizzing them on spelling words. I'm tucking them into bed. So I limit my evening meetings to one night per week. That ensures a boundary between family and ministry. It also ensures that I keep my priorities straight—family before ministry.

2. Start meetings by sharing wins.

I open every meeting by allowing team members to share personal or corporate wins. It creates positive energy and puts us in a positive frame of mind.

It is the job of leaders to find every excuse they can to celebrate everything they can. We need to celebrate the wins as a way of glorifying God and as a way of affirming one another.

Sharing wins is the most important part of every meeting we have. It reminds us that God is doing some amazing things week-in and week-out, and we have the privilege of being a part of it. It helps us zoom out and refocus on why we're doing what we're doing.

3. Don't avoid conflict.

Job 11:6 is one of my theological linchpins. "True wisdom has two sides (NLT)." In other words, truth is found in the tension of opposites. No tension equals no truth. One of the greatest meeting mistakes leaders make is short-circuiting conflict.

Don't get me wrong. It is the job of a leader to defuse unhealthy or unnecessary tension. I don't have time for tension that is the byproduct of immaturity. But, we ought to be wrestling with issues, and we need differences of opinion. After all, iron sharpens iron. Sparks may fly, but

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meetings without any tension are dull.

Good leaders find ways of affirming individuals while fostering constructive conflict. A well-debated issue results in broader perspectives and deeper convictions. It also gives team members a sense of ownership because they have a voice.

4. Mix up meeting times and places.

Don't fall into a meeting rut—the same "Bat place" at the same "Bat time." You've got to mix it up. You need a change of pace or a change of place so you can experience a change of perspective. One key to creativity is a change of geography.

When we have an important decision to make or issue to discuss, I try to schedule an off-site meeting. My mind is less cluttered when I'm away from the office, and I find that our staff is able to check out of their routine. They don't hear their phones ringing, and they aren't as distracted by the things they need to do.

We do our annual staff planning retreat at Baltimore's Inner Harbor. I try to take our team to conferences. We occasionally do off-site meetings at the National Cathedral. Sometimes we'll just go up on the rooftop of our coffeehouse on Capitol Hill for a change of scenery on a nice day.

5. Don't talk corporately about individual issues.

If you don't control your agenda, your agenda will control you. Some issues need to be on everybody's radar, but others ought to be handled one on one. When you discuss irrelevant issues in a corporate setting people begin to view meetings as a waste of time.

We ran into that problem with our staff meetings not long ago. I discovered that everybody has an opinion about everything—especially things they aren't responsible for. We would spin our

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wheels on irrelevant issues and waste time. Our meetings were actually hurting our corporate productivity. That is one reason we decided to go to a monthly all-staff meeting. Weekly meetings were unnecessary. Now, only our creative team meets weekly to brainstorm and "praystorm" our weekend gatherings.

6. Cut your agenda in half.

Here is a good rule of thumb: the more you talk about, the less you will accomplish. When you discuss a couple of issues you feel empowered. You're able to wrap your mind around those issues. It's motivating. But when you discuss too many issues it begins to produce feelings of being overwhelmed. Cut your agenda in half, and you'll be less stressed and more motivated.

7. Make sure everything you talk about lands on a to-do list.

You know what drives me crazy? People who point out problems but don't offer solutions. No matter how good the plan, they can find some reason why it might not work. Quit pointing out problems, and become part of the solution.

Make sure someone is responsible for everything you talk about. If you don't, it'll end up on the next meeting agenda and cause twice the frustration.

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