FREE SAMPLE

TEAM HABITS

How Small Actions Lead to Extraordinary Results

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NINE

MEETINGS

In a good meeting, there is a momentum that comes from the spontaneous exchange of fresh ideas and produces extraordinary results.

—Harold Geneen

One of the reasons meetings are such a go-to for people when they're thinking of team habits to change is that they are the context in which all other team habits come into play.

You experience belonging and trust in real time. You see decision-making, goal-setting, and planning in action. Communication and collaboration habits pop up as you start talking about how you will work together to get it all done.

Meetings are one of those places where, in the span of an hour, you see all your bad team habits one after another in rapid succession. People talk over each other. People feel excluded from the process. The plan goes wonky (or it becomes clear that it was never there to begin with). Decisions are rushed, and next steps are lost. It's not clear who's on first, so "somebody" gets a lot of jobs.

Meetings are also painful because when we're in the middle of one—particularly one that's going badly—we're hyperaware that there's a bunch of other work we could be doing. Work that (hopefully) we find meaningful, challenging, and fulfilling. Work that (probably) someone else is going to call us out for not doing because we were stuck in this meeting.

It's a rare organization or team that can honestly say they love every meeting they have.

Meetings can be either a powerful force multiplier or a powerful force diminisher. Getting people together for a great meeting can create a leverage factor for a team's energy that can make something completely different and better. Or it can diminish your team's attention and capacity and keep them from doing the work they should be doing.

The great thing about focusing on meetings is that you don't need to go to senior executives for buy-in to improve them. You don't need to coordinate with another team or business unit to make changes. You can simply decide with your team that you're going to change your meeting culture into something that supports you in doing your best work.

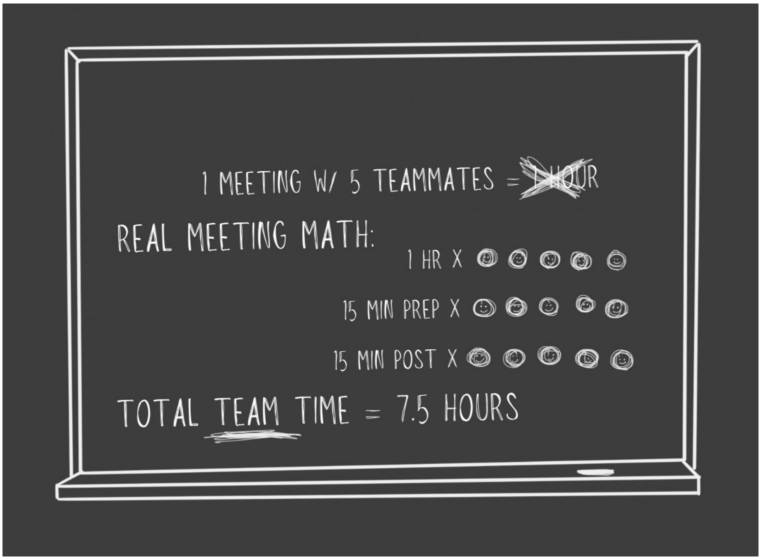
All of this is why meetings are a great place to start when addressing team habits. But if you're still not convinced of the true cost of poorly done meetings, it's time to break out the calculator.

MEETING MATH

When the $500 office printer breaks, we have to fill out a requisition form or purchase order to replace it. That $500 gets scrutinized before it is approved—or not. But when we want to call a meeting? Nothing stops us, even though most meetings cost far more than $500 from the perspective of salaries and blocks of time.

In business, it is harder to get access to money, even though it is easier to get more of it, than it is to get access to the thing we have a massive shortage of: people's full engagement and attention.

Let's look at the true cost of a meeting.



How Long Are Meetings, Actually?

You've called a one-hour meeting. How much time does that really soak up?

- Before the meeting: fifteen minutes of prep and transition. This is the time spent transitioning from whatever you were doing into meeting mode.
- Meeting time: the one hour of time *actually* scheduled for the meeting.
- After the meeting: fifteen to twenty minutes of exit and admin time. Most meetings create more work, whether that is sending out a message, spending time making a decision about what was discussed, or just transitioning back into deeper work.
- When you look at it this way, a one-hour meeting really takes up at least ninety minutes of your time.

How Many Meetings Do You Actually Have per Week?

You may look at your calendar and say you have between three and five standing meetings every week. Not bad, right? Until you start factoring in all the unexpected “crutch meetings” that pop up at the last minute. (Crutch meetings are meetings that act as a stand-in for a poor team habit; we’ll talk about them in more detail in a minute.)

Normally when I do this exercise with clients, they’ll tell me that 50 percent of the meetings they had last week were one-off meetings that don’t normally happen. But when we go further back through their schedules, it becomes clear that “one-off” meetings essentially take up the same amount of time each week. They might as well be considered standing meetings, which means you need to take them into account in your schedule. (And then, as we’ll discuss, figure out how to eliminate them.)

Taking crutch meetings into account, you may *actually* have eight standing meetings a week that average forty-five minutes each. Using the rule of thumb that there will be at least thirty minutes of prep and admin time before and after each meeting, that’s a full ten hours of every workweek eaten up by meetings.

That leaves you thirty hours in a typical workweek to do the work you’re ostensibly being paid to do. Not too bad, right?

Hold on just one second—it gets worse.

When Are Meetings Held?

When the meeting is held is just as important as how long it is. If you schedule a meeting at 8 a.m., for example, you catch most people in their warm-up cycle. Most people aren’t ready for deep conversation at that time, which means the meeting will be longer than needed, more confusing than anticipated, or just plain useless.

What’s more likely is that you put invisible work on your team to show up earlier to work to prepare for the meeting. Time spent preparing for the 8 a.m. meeting displaces the time your teammates were probably spending on self-care, family, or sleep.

Scheduling meetings at 9:30 or 10 a.m. isn’t much better, but for different reasons. That midmorning meeting essentially ensures that your teammates don’t get a full focus block on either side of the meeting. Unless they get to work super early, they will probably spend the morning on admin and then spend the hour after the meeting pushing things around before lunch. That hour-long meeting ends up demolishing an entire morning's worth of focused work.

At Team PF, we tend to schedule meetings at 11 a.m., 1 p.m., or 3 p.m. An 11 a.m. meeting gives people a good focus block of work in the morning, after which they can come to the meeting warmed up and ready. A 1 p.m. meeting harnesses that "just back from lunch" energy while leaving a solid amount of time in the afternoon for focus blocks, and 3 p.m. can be a powerful meeting time or not, depending on your team's chronotypes (which we will talk about more in the team core habits chapter).

This can be more difficult to manage with teams that span multiple time zones. The important thing is to work with your teammates to find the option that best fits all of your schedules.

The day on which meetings happen during the week can also be a force multiplier or diminisher because it determines the shape and cadence of the week. This is why we see so many planning and coordination meetings on Monday or Tuesday. If you schedule a planning meeting on Thursday, people are either frazzled or distracted by looming end-of-week deadlines. Whatever you planned during that meeting will be tough to remember by the following week.

It's less palpable, but the timing of certain types of meetings during a month can also shape the workflow of a month or quarter.

In our imaginary meeting math example, we've established that you technically have eight seventy-five-minute meetings throughout the week. Take a look at when they fall. How many of them are effectively torpedoing an entire morning's or afternoon's worth of work?

How Many People Are at the Meeting?

The final calculation in meeting math is this: If you have one hour-long meeting with eight people, *you're actually having twelve hours' worth of meetings*. (This is after we take into account the buffer time on either side of the meeting.)

You're using up eight hours of time and attention. Eight hours of people's salary. When you think about it that way, eliminating one meeting can eliminate that claim on eight people's attention and free up much more time for actual work to happen.

Meeting math is the answer to the question of why your team is having such a hard time pushing projects forward. Why are they not getting strategic work done? Why are they burning out? Why do they keep getting blocked by the strategic-recurring-urgent work logjams that we talked about in the chapter on planning?

Once you factor in meeting math, you can see why there's just not enough time in most people's calendars to do their work.

If they *are* getting work done, odds are that they're doing it in such a way that it is pushing them along the road to burnout because the only times they can find focus blocks are nights and weekends, when their schedule isn't being interrupted by meetings.

MEETING MATH EXAMPLE

Standing meetings per week	8 meetings
x Time spent per meeting (including buffer time)	1.5 hours
= Total time (per person) spent in meetings	12 hours
x Number of teammates	8 people
= Total team time spent in meetings	96 hours
x Average hourly pay	$50 per hour
= Amount spent on meetings per week	$4,800 per week

The team in the above example is spending $240,000 per year on meetings, yet no one can get approval to replace the printer that's been out-of-date for years.

I'm not trying to say that all meetings are bad. I *am* saying that I want your team to have meetings that intentionally and habitually act as a multiplying force of your team's ability to do their best work. Understanding meeting math can give you a powerful tool and language to start tackling team habits around meetings.

Eliminate Crutch Meetings

One question I often get asked is this: When counting meetings, should you note every quick one-on-one conversation with a teammate? What if you and a coworker ran by a third teammate's desk to straighten out your questions with a ten-minute chat? How many people need to be at a meeting for it to "count"?

When auditing your meetings, resist the urge to be legalistic about how to specifically define a meeting and instead go with the old mantra "I'll know it when I see it."

A quick meeting with a coworker can be a huge time saver. If you were gone for a couple of days, you could easily log in to Slack on your first morning back and spend ninety minutes sifting through threads to catch up. Or you could phone a friend and get caught up in five minutes. Was that technically a meeting? Don't worry about it too much.

You *do* need to be on the sharp lookout for when meetings become crutches for bad team habits in other categories.

Crutch meetings are used to address things that should be taken care of outside the meeting but aren't. Your plan keeps going off the rails, so you call a meeting to fix it. Your communication has broken down, so you call a meeting to get everyone on the same page. No one knows what the priorities are, so—you get the idea.

When you take a deeper look at people's overloaded meeting schedules, it becomes clear that many of those one-off meetings are actually crutch meetings. If you want to remove them from your schedule for good, you need to address what's causing them and get ahead of it.

The daily standup, which we touched on in the chapter on planning, is a good example of a potential crutch meeting. If you need to have a daily standup because you don't have another clear way to keep everyone on track, it's an expensive way to fix a planning problem. But it could also be the case that you're in a VUCA environment—such as a merger, reorg, or global pandemic—and the daily standup is the best way to quickly identify the day's priorities and update team members on new information.

What's Your Meeting Promoter Score?

Your meeting promoter score is a play on the net promoter score, which was created by Fred Reichheld and outlined in his book *The Ultimate Question*.[1] In the same way that marketers can get a quick sense of how well their product or company is doing based on the question "How likely are you to recommend [X] to a friend?," you can quickly discover whether a meeting was worthwhile by asking, "Would you recommend this meeting to a coworker?"

Meetings affect every one of us uniquely. If you're a social person, even mediocre meetings might be the highlight of your day. If you're an introvert, even showing up to the best meeting ever could be an energy drain.

As you explore team habit shifts around meetings, keep in mind that however you feel about meetings, others on your team might not feel the same way. **For a lot of people, having a meeting on the schedule adds an additional layer of anxiety to the day.**

Even a virtual meeting means having to put makeup on, having to be approachable, remembering to smile, or making small talk. There might be stressful logistical questions to answer, such as "Do I need to be on camera? Will the dogs start barking? What if I have to breastfeed? Do I need to tidy up my office?"

I could get on a call and talk all day, but that's not the case with most of my teammates. I know that every time I call a meeting, each of them has an additional level of negotiation that I am not necessarily privy to in order to show up for the meeting. I'm serious about that responsibility.

One of the things that surprises a lot of people when they join Team PF is that they tend to end meetings feeling glad that they were there. They leave more connected, inspired, and excited than they were before the meeting. We work hard to make sure that every meeting on the calendar is multiplying the force of our team's efforts rather than draining them.

ROCKET PRACTICE

AUDIT YOUR MEETINGS

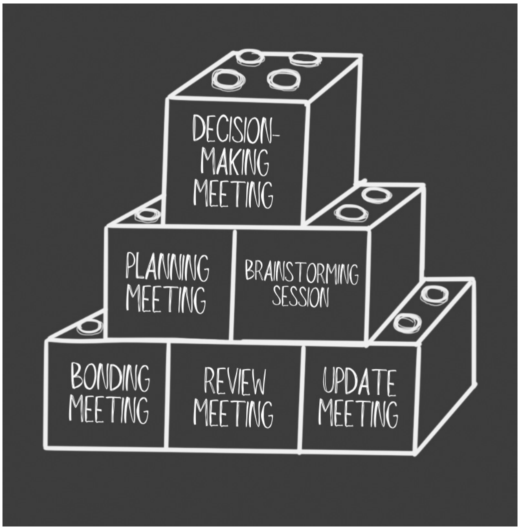
- Look at your schedule of standing meetings on a weekly and monthly basis and then work through the meeting math above. To your best estimate, how much time and salary are being spent on meetings each week?
- When do meetings happen during the day? Do they impede potential focus blocks for your teammates? Is there a different time of day that would make more sense to ensure that everyone in attendance can engage? Be sure to account for teammates in different time zones.
- Does your weekly, monthly, and quarterly meeting schedule drive work forward and create force multiplication? Or does it diminish and squander the team's time, energy, and attention?
- How many meetings on your schedule in the last six weeks were actually crutch meetings? What faulty habit created the need for that meeting? Once you notice a trend, that's probably the next team habit to start working on.
- To determine whether a meeting is worth keeping on the schedule, ask yourself and your team, "Are you glad we had this meeting? Did it drive our energy and focus or disperse it? If you had to review it on Yelp, would you recommend it to a friend or teammate?" If the answer is no, the next question you need to ask is "What can we do to make our meetings less stressful, more effective, and more of an amazing force multiplier for the rest of our team?"

BUILDING BETTER MEETINGS

How many times have you walked into a conference room or logged in to Zoom with no clear idea of what the meeting you're about to attend is for?

Building better meetings starts with understanding that not all meetings are cut from the same cloth. **Every meeting falls into one of six categories, or is made up of blocks of those categories—many of which mirror the categories of team habits we've been talking about.**

When you start a team habit of defining meeting categories, it helps you put into perspective what meetings are necessary for what reasons. And, hopefully, relieves your teammates of the frustration of stepping into a conference room or logging on to a Zoom call without a clue as to what's going on.



The Six Meeting Blocks

Decision-Making Meeting

The point of a decision-making meeting is to get the appropriate number of people at the table to go from information to decision. Decision-making meetings are called either early in the process, when you know a decision is going to come up, or later on, when you have gotten stuck and need a decision to drive work forward.

Planning Meeting

Planning meetings are designed to get the team on board with a certain course of action and align your activity with a timeline. In an ideal world, most of the preliminary decisions would have been made before going into a planning meeting, but some planning meetings are designed to help inform the decisions that need to be made in order to execute the plan. Once you've had your planning meeting, you can then have a shorter decision-making meeting that includes just the required people.

Brainstorming Session

The goal of a brainstorming session is to generate potential solutions and courses of action. For a brainstorming session, the goal should be to keep expanding possibilities rather than distilling those ideas and options into actionable solutions.

Bonding Meeting

The main point of a bonding meeting is to build belonging and rapport by getting to know each other better. The topic of conversation should be work only insofar as it makes people more comfortable socializing.

I want to slow down on that point for a moment. A lot of facilitators tend to be extroverted quick thinkers and don't see the problem with ambushing teammates with a bunch of thoughtful icebreakers designed to get conversation flowing. But a lot of people would rather not just show up and talk about themselves without being given time to prepare. Having work-related conversations invites them into the conversation, as opposed to putting them on the spot with questions that can seem intrusive, like "What are your dreams?" or even "What are your plans for this weekend?"

We talked about one of my favorite questions for these types of meetings in the chapter on belonging: "What are your nonwork wins?" In my experience, anyone can engage with that question without feeling as if they are participating in some sort of public journaling exercise.

Review Meeting

The point of the review meeting (or debrief, or after-action review) is to look over a previous activity and see what worked and what didn't work and to develop insights that you can apply to current or future plans and projects.

Update Meeting

The job of the update meeting is to keep people informed about what's going on, distill the key information, and provide a place for people to ask questions. An update meeting is a sense-making meeting where you just help people make sense of what's happening around them.

I hesitated to put update meetings on this list because I've been to far too many update meetings that could have been an email or that were so packed with such high-level communication that I left feeling less clear about what was going on then when I went in.

A good rule of thumb for update meetings is that people should leave feeling more clear, aligned, and engaged with the work ahead. "Engaged" doesn't necessarily mean inspired and excited; resolute will do.

Using Meeting Blocks

Think of the six types of meetings as building blocks. You can choose from the blocks to create a meeting that builds belonging, helps you brainstorms ideas, and leads to decisions. Or you can create a meeting that provides updates on progress, then helps you decide on a path forward.

Thinking of each of these as separate blocks will improve your meetings in a few ways.

Build Complementary Meetings

Not all meeting blocks play well with one another. For example, having a bonding block after a review block can be difficult. If you are brutally honest about what went well and what went wrong during the review meeting, people might feel too defensive for a bonding exercise. There are ways of debriefing that build belonging, but it's tricky. As a facilitator, you need to know you're potentially playing with fire when you combine these two blocks.

While brainstorming, decision-making, and planning meeting blocks seem as if they naturally complement each other, they can also be problematic when included in the same meeting. Switching between those three mental states can be tough, which means that as a facilitator, you need to be very clear about what state you're in.

Call Out Block Switches

When a meeting slides from one type to another without the facilitator calling out that there has been a switch, it can feel confusing. People aren't sure how to engage, and they might not be sure what you need from them. Calling out what type of block you're in during a meeting lets your teammates know how to partner with you better at every step.

Let's go back to the example of brainstorming and decision-making. When used in the same meeting, they can either become a muddy mess or be extremely effective, depending on how well the facilitator calls out what phase the meeting is currently in. I recommend starting with brainstorming. Once the brainstorming session is over, make it clear that you are now in the deciding portion of the meeting. This gives everyone—especially the creative folks—the cue that it's not time for eighteen more ideas; it's time to pare the ideas down to the best ones.

Sometimes, meetings can make an unplanned shift into a different block. Update meetings in particular have a habit of sliding into decision-making, reviewing, and brainstorming. You will be on your third update point of seven when somebody jumps in to ask strategy questions or start brainstorming solutions. As a facilitator, it's your job to say, "I appreciate that, but the point of this meeting is to update. We'll schedule a separate conversation for brainstorming or planning."

Avoid Overstuffed Meetings

As you learn how your team works, you'll also develop a sense of how quickly you can get through topics and types of meeting blocks. If I see an agenda that has us brainstorming six topics in one hour, I know we will never get through it. Our team takes twenty minutes on average to get through a brainstorming block, which means we either need to reschedule the meeting to a longer time block, break it into parts, or find another way to do the brainstorming.

When looking at an overstuffed meeting, resist the urge to squeeze out the bonding block at the beginning or skip noting the next steps at the end. Both of those are hugely important parts of the meeting, and the five to ten minutes you'll save by cutting them will create downstream problems in team performance, belonging, and collaboration.

If you do need to squeeze something out of an agenda, do the hard work of triaging what needs to go into this meeting and deciding how you can get through the rest of the work elsewhere. And if you need multiple meetings to cover it all, then schedule multiple meetings. Don't try to crush everything into too short a time.

Set Clear Agendas (with Clear Facilitators)

If I was king of meetings for a day, I would create two rules. The first would be that you don't get to request a meeting without an agenda. The second would be that you don't get to ask for a meeting when it's not clear who the facilitator is.

Those two things are intimately connected because if they are not set, we're back to the "somebody" problem. Somebody will figure out the agenda, and somebody will lead the conversation. But when we all log in to the video call at 11 a.m. Team Standard Time, "somebody" hasn't shown up to lead the meeting.

My rule is that if you call the meeting, you are the facilitator. If you want the meeting, it's now your job to come up with the agenda and drive the conversation. This is considerably harder than most people think, which means that in the future, they might find another way to obtain that information than a meeting.

Thinking about meeting blocks makes the job much easier for both the facilitator and the rest of us who are showing up. If you tell me the meeting is to "talk about" Project X, I don't know what I need to do to prepare. If I know the meeting is so that we can come to a decision on Project X, I know exactly what is expected of me when I show up.

As well as assigning a facilitator, it can also be useful to assign other meeting roles, such as a scribe for note-taking and a timekeeper who can keep an eye on the clock and make sure enough time is left for alignment and next steps.

Meeting Templates

Much of the work for the facilitator is thinking through how they'll lead the conversation effectively. One way to solve that issue quickly is to use meeting templates. Meeting templates don't have to be restrictive; they can simply be a rough agenda template that has the key building blocks for certain types of meetings baked in.

For example, most team meetings need some time for grounding and bonding before diving into the meat of the agenda, so it makes sense for that to be a standard block on the agenda. But you can approach that bonding block in a number of ways. You could leave it as open water-cooler time, where people take a few minutes to chat about their weekend at the Monday-morning update meeting. You could make it more structured, where everyone has a minute to answer an icebreaker question.

At Team PF, we start our monthly update meeting by asking for everyone's wins and celebrations. This has the benefit of starting the meeting with some lightness and levity and gives us a chance to learn what everyone else has been up to. It's also an incredibly powerful way to kick off the rest of the meeting with forward momentum and confidence.

If you're scheduling a problem-solving meeting, you might start with an update block to get everyone on the same page. Next, you might have a brainstorming session, followed by a planning block and then the next steps. Instead of repeatedly rebuilding that agenda from scratch, create a meeting template that anyone who is facilitating can use whenever your team needs to solve a problem.

As a side benefit, creating or reconstructing meeting templates can be a powerful opportunity to think together as a team about all the other things that you do outside the meeting.

For example, when we created our template for team development meetings (our spin on performance reviews), it made us rethink how we wanted to approach the entire review process. Typically, a performance review is top down, with your boss coming in and telling you whether or not you're doing great. At Team PF, we decided to invert that model and create a container for the team members to tell their manager how things are going and bring up hard conversations they might need to have.

Our team development meeting has several key parts:

- We talk about what you've done well over the most recent period of time.
- We ask what internal challenges you're having (e.g., you don't have your schedule properly aligned for your chronotype).
- We ask what external blockers have made it difficult for you to work (e.g., team priorities are unclear or in conflict).
- We ask if there are any hard conversations that you need to have with your manager or as a team.
- We ask what you are interested in focusing on in the future.

Creating this template allowed us to reshape the typical performance review and turn it into a meeting that increases belonging, proactively addresses hard conversations, and builds excitement for the future.

ROCKET PRACTICE

BUILD MEETING TEMPLATES

» What types of meetings do you have most frequently? Think in terms of different time horizons: daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually. Don't worry about capturing all of them in your first pass. If your time is limited, start by thinking about your daily and weekly recurring meetings.

» Pick two to three kinds of meetings to work on first, and review the building blocks you use. What blocks could you add to improve the meeting (for example, a bonding block at the beginning of the meeting)? What blocks could you subtract (for example, an update block that could be an email)?

- Share your proposed meeting template with your team in advance of the next meeting. Don't surprise your team in real time with a brand-new way of doing things; take advantage of the IKEA effect and get buy-in by inviting them to help you create a better meeting structure.
- Give your team three to five runs of the new meeting template before you decide to make too many changes to it. That will help you dial in how much time you actually need per building block and give you a sense of what other team habits are being displaced or absorbed by the new meeting structure.
- As you begin to audit your meetings, start to build a library of templates. What should be in your weekly huddle? What can you add that would make it more powerful? What can you subtract? (You will find examples of meeting templates at teamhabitsbook.com/resources.)

MAKE THE DEFAULT "NO INVITE"

Once you start thinking about meeting math, it quickly becomes clear that a teamwide meeting request for thirty minutes is a way bigger ask than many of us have been led to think. Maybe you've concluded that the meeting is still necessary—but does everyone on the team need to be there?

We've already discussed several reasons why you might not invite someone to a meeting. In the chapter on belonging, we discussed intentional exclusion as a kindness you can do for your coworkers. In the chapter on goal-setting and prioritization, we talked about how people who are wearing the green hat (meaning in the middle of high-priority work on a project) may not need to attend a meeting that would sidetrack them from their work.

As a meeting facilitator, it's your job to ask who else doesn't belong on your invite list.

Unlike culling people from your holiday soiree, dropping people from a work meeting that they don't need to attend is a kindness. And when your team habit is that your default is no invite, it becomes a forcing function to make sure that every person you invite to every meeting has a clear reason for needing to be there.

If the reason for a person's attendance isn't clear, do one of two things:

- Let them know they don't need to be at the meeting and tell them why. For example, the meeting will focus on approving graphic assets for a launch, and their part of the project doesn't involve the graphics.
- Think through the meeting agenda and revise it so that their contribution is clear. For example, even though their part of the project doesn't involve the graphics, you need to tap their technical expertise so that the final graphics play nicely with the marketing automation software that person manages.

"You need to stay informed" isn't a fantastic reason for your teammate to be at a meeting. It's not *incorrect*—they do need to stay informed. But if you send an update email at the end of the meeting, that teammate can skim it in five minutes and be able to stay on track with their workday.

When the default is no invite, the result is that anyone who's at the meeting has a purpose for being there and knows what it is. This gives your teammates the gift of being able to be fully engaged in the meeting versus either showing up without being prepared to contribute or attending under duress while thinking about the work they could be doing instead.

The inverse team habit is to make it possible for individual teammates to ask why they need to be at a meeting if they're unsure. They shouldn't ask in a hostile way but rather to obtain clarity and context about how they'll contribute.

There is an exception to the "default is no invite" rule: bonding meetings. If people are especially busy, it's easy to assume that because they're on a high-priority project, they probably shouldn't be spending their time at meetings unrelated to the work at hand. True. But in that case, I would suggest delaying the bonding meeting until every team member can be there.

This respects the time of the team member who is wearing the green hat *without* also giving the impression that bonding actually isn't important. Even if we don't explicitly say so, excluding busy team members from a bonding session tells everyone that the work itself is more important than coming together as a team.

ROCKET PRACTICE

WHY AM I AT THIS MEETING?

» For every person who is invited to a meeting, write one to three sentences to explain why their presence is required. Bonus points if you share it with your teammates so they can come prepared to fully participate.

» Create a team habit where every team member can ask for clarification about why they should be at a meeting so that they can either become a better team player by participating in the meeting or get back to work that is a more valuable use of their time and attention.

» If the purpose of the meeting is primarily bonding, delay it until everyone on the team is able to attend.

CAPTURE NEXT STEPS

In theory, we all know that it doesn't make sense to have an entire meeting and then walk away without going over the next steps. *Of course* we should capture our ideas at the end of the meeting and turn our decisions into action points.

In practice, we are probably not doing it as well as we could.

The main reason is that our meetings are crammed with different building blocks, and we simply don't leave ourselves the last five to ten minutes to process what needs to happen. Why does this become a problem?

- The context in which we are having the meeting differs from the context in which we will be doing the work, and details will inevitably be missed in the transfer. For example, we may be brainstorming in Google Docs or on a whiteboard in the conference room. But that space probably isn't also where we keep track of team tasks and draft work, so unless one of us converts these notes into tasks in a team channel, the work we did disappears.
- We expect individual participants to keep track of their own next steps. I have my list and you have your list, but because there's no central source of truth, there's nothing to keep us from drifting. We decided on the call that we are going to California, but because it's not written down, neither of us realizes that I meant Sacramento while you were thinking San Diego.
- It seems pretty clear who's doing what, so you don't bring it up. *Or* you have no idea who will own the action item, but it will take so long to figure it out that it seems easier to just not do so. Either way, "somebody" ends up with the task because we didn't take the time to assign it.

In an ideal world, you leave the meeting with fewer open loops than you started with. Not adequately dealing with next steps means that even if your meeting closed a few loops, it opened up even more.

ROCKET PRACTICE

DEFINE NEXT STEPS

While it's always a good team habit to practice properly capturing and assigning next steps, there are a few cases in which you need to be especially clear. You might have a new teammate who does not have the same high-level context about how you do things around here. Or maybe you just switched collaborative technology and need to remind people not to look at the old team wiki but to go check the Notion board instead. You could be in the middle of a major context or priority shift or a high-urgency event, such as a launch, and some of your team habits may have shifted or been suspended.

Even if you're not in any of those situations, you may know that next steps and action items are being lost. If so, this team habit needs to shift.

» When you set the agenda for a meeting, leave five to ten minutes for capturing next actions and designate one person to add those action items to the team collaboration space. (Remember from the last chapter, teamwork needs to happen in team channels.)

» For each action item, include these four elements:

1. What is the action item?
2. Who owns it?
3. Where does it live?
4. When will we see it show up in that spot?

» If you sense that you need to make a radical change around how you capture next steps, schedule a separate meeting to discuss it. That way, you're not trying to figure it out while distracting from the topic of another regular meeting. Using the meeting blocks, design a meeting specifically to address changing this team habit.

CHAPTER 9 TAKEAWAYS

- Meetings can be either a powerful force multiplier or a powerful force diminisher, which is why they're a good place to start when it comes to changing team habits.
- Every meeting has hidden costs. A one-hour meeting with five team members actually takes up ninety minutes per team member. What could your team do with an extra seven and a half hours a week?

- Every meeting should have a facilitator and an agenda.
- Use the six meeting blocks (decision-making, planning, brainstorming, bonding, review, and update) to build better meetings and create meeting templates.
- Everyone who attends a meeting should have a clearly defined reason for being there. Otherwise, the default should be no invite.
- Leave time at the end of every meeting to capture next steps.

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