

Extreme Ways to Shorten and Reduce Meetings

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All managers spend a bigger chunk of their workdays in meetings than they'd like. Meetings interrupt your workflow, eat up hours you could be spending more productively, and even **increase fatigue**. While getting everyone in a room to discuss an issue might be the only way to make a decision, some companies have laid down the law to reduce meetings that waste people's time.

It goes without saying that a good leader who starts on time and sticks to a firm agenda makes for a productive meeting. Here are a few more extreme techniques for keeping meetings on track.

Count down remaining time with a stopwatch. Meetings that start late and go over are more commonplace than they should be. **BusinessWeek reports** that large Google meetings stay on time thanks to a visible, ticking clock.

To add a little pressure to keep meetings focused, Google gatherings often feature a giant timer on the wall, counting down the minutes left for a particular meeting or topic. It's literally a downloadable timer that runs off a computer and is projected 4 feet tall.

Here's more on [how to run a meeting like Google](#).

Keep everyone standing. No one's willing to linger too long on a tangent in a meeting if their feet hurt. Blogger John Trosko said **instituting "stand-up" meetings** at a Los Angeles-based company he worked at made them more efficient and faster.

Instead of sitting at a traditional conference table, we took the chairs out of the room and ran meetings while standing on our feet. Well, the length of the meetings **DRASTICALLY** dropped, because people didn't want to stand for long. Meetings went from 30-60 minutes to roughly 1/2 of that while still delivering meaty content.

Ban distractions. Todd Wilkens at design firm Adaptive Path says that he **gets meeting attendees to focus** by asking everyone to forgo their laptops, iPhones, and BlackBerries during the meeting. He goes the extra mile to make this happen: he'll call out folks who are surreptitiously checking email in-meeting, and will even ask everyone to put their mobile devices in a box or on a counter in the corner of the room during the meeting.

Never schedule meetings more than 30 minutes long. At web application development firm 37Signals, meetings rarely happen because they're **considered harmful**. But if a meeting is absolutely necessary? Make it no longer than 30 minutes, go in with a very specific issue at hand, and hold the meeting at "the site of the problem" — have the code, design, documents, numbers in front of you. Here's more from [Ryan Singer at 37Signals on making meetings more useful](#).

Sometimes just keeping good meeting practices front and center during a gathering can help. At tech publisher O'Reilly's main campus, **meeting guidelines** are posted on the wall of every conference room.

What are your most effective techniques for keeping meetings short and down to a minimum? Post them in the comments.

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