



5 Questions to Prepare for

# More Productive Meetings

This article is part of the Jhana®  
for Individuals solution by FranklinCovey.

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# Take your meetings from snooze to “can’t refuse.”

We all know the pain of sitting through boring, unorganized, and downright wasteful meetings. When all that stands between you, your team, and a wildly productive meeting is a little preparation, you owe it to yourself and your people to lay the groundwork.

It may take a few minutes to answer these questions, but doing so can help you avoid calling bad meetings—and help make the meetings you do call more productive.



# 1. What work do I want to accomplish with this meeting?

Begin with the end in mind.

If you don't have a quick, clear answer to this question, consider why. It's all too easy to default to calling a meeting to "get input," especially if you haven't clearly defined the task at hand or want to move a project forward but aren't sure how. If this is you, spend time defining or coming up with possible next steps for your project before you call a meeting (and if you really get stuck, ask your manager or a trusted mentor for help).

On the other hand, maybe the meeting's purpose is obvious. For example, you might need to make a decision or gather information in order to make one, plan a project, or just make sure everyone is on the same page. You could also be after a people-related outcome—you want to reconcile a past misunderstanding, for example.

Regardless, the process of identifying exactly what you want to get out of the meeting will help you structure an efficient agenda and make real progress.

Use this box to write out the purpose of your meeting and what you would like to get out of it.

## 2. Are there ways other than a meeting to achieve the desired result?

Pick the right tool for the job.

If you're soliciting ideas, could you just use a group-brainstorming document? If you need information or approval to move forward, could a series of quick 1-on-1 online chats or phone calls give you what you need? Could the group provide input on their own time via an email thread if, for example, you need simple feedback on a proposal? Even if these alternatives end up taking a little more time for you to execute, they may still be more efficient if they require less time and interruption of the group.

Keep in mind, though, that meetings allow for people to build on and feed off of each other's ideas in a way that isn't likely to happen in an email thread, so a meeting may be a better option when you need strategic input. Meetings also offer additional cues like body language or tone of voice, and give everyone the exact same information at the same time (reducing the potential for misunderstandings and gossip).

**Use this box to list some additional ways you could get this work done without calling a meeting.**

# 3. Whom should I ask to attend the meeting?

## Strike the perfect balance.

First, assess the value of each person's attendance. Who must attend to get the work done, and whose presence is nice to have but not critical for success? You don't want to overload the meeting with too many people, but adding a "nice to have" or two—for example, a peer from another department with an outside perspective—could pay dividends.

Also, remember that every time you hold a meeting, you're stopping work for everyone else and commanding their attention for your agenda. Before asking people to attend a meeting, consider the following:

- What do they stand to gain from this meeting?
- Do they have time to meet now, or are some racing to meet important deadlines?
- Does calling the meeting show respect for their time and priorities?

If you're not sure about the timing or value of the meeting for certain attendees, you could ask them ahead of time for their thoughts on the meeting or make their attendance optional.

Use this box to list some additional ways you could get this work done without calling a meeting.

## 4. Is there additional work I should do before calling the meeting?

Tick and tie the loose ends.

The last thing you want is a group of people sitting around a table or video screens, realizing they're missing something they need in order to accomplish the meeting objective. It's worth asking: *Do I have all the information to make the meeting as productive as possible?*

And think about your attendees; they may be going from meeting to meeting, offering their input on multiple projects. They are likely less prepared than you

are to discuss the topic at hand. As the person calling the meeting, it's your responsibility to bring everyone up to speed so they can contribute to the conversation.

For example, say you need to get a group's reaction to a potential new sales offering. Will your meeting attendees have all the background information on market trends they'll need in order to give an informed opinion? If not, gather it with enough time for attendees to review before the meeting.

List the due diligence you should do on your own before calling your next meeting.

## 5. How can I make the most progress with attendees before the meeting?

Hit the ground running.

If you're able to move the starting point of your meeting further in the process, then you'll be more likely to make far more progress during your meeting, hold a shorter meeting, or both.

So instead of spending the first 10 minutes of your meeting "getting people up to speed" or walking through a slide deck, share slide decks ahead of time and/or spell out key issues in a premeeting announcement.

**For example:**

*"Hi all! In Tuesday's meeting, we'll be discussing the pros and cons of the potential new sales offering."*

*Below are key questions for the group to think about in advance. We'll discuss answers for the first 10 minutes of the meeting. If anyone has additional questions, please feel free to add them."*

This way, attendees can begin the meeting sharing viewpoints they developed ahead of time, rather than processing the information and developing viewpoints in real time. For any meeting announcements, be sure to include a complete agenda for the meeting and any additional background materials attendees will need to accomplish the meeting objective.

**List background information you can send prior to the meeting to help everyone get on the same page and in the same frame of mind.**

# Time is money—make the most of it.

Holding a meeting is an important tool in your arsenal for success in achieving your organization's objectives. But setting a meeting should always be done with consideration for both your team's and your time and resources. No one wants a day full of meetings, and most people would agree that too many meetings can actually lead to tunnel vision or loss of productivity. By asking yourself these five questions before calling a meeting, you'll avoid the downsides of meetings while reaping the benefits of holding those you do call.

Meetings can be a powerful tool to move projects forward, accomplish goals, or share insights. They are how we get things done together, but they can have the opposite effect when they are abused or held without much thought. By asking yourself these five questions before calling a meeting, your additional preparation will exponentially increase your meetings' effectiveness.

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