



I work in a fast-paced corporate environment with back-to-back meetings on my daily schedule. My creative project work time is shrinking—any suggestions?

– *Meetings Overload*

Judy: Creativity plays a role not only in projects, but also in how you work. Why not look at your workday as an opportunity for innovation? Begin with your own schedule. You can easily build in an hour of work time every day by blocking your schedule with “office hours.” The last hour of the day generally works well. I gave myself this gift of time when I was in a corporate office, and it was so efficient that I wondered why I hadn’t done it sooner.

Do you personally schedule and lead some of the meetings? If so, how can you use a little ingenuity to develop new practices? When I was at Target, I provided an agenda for meetings, but added something new: a time allotment for each topic. I kept an eye on the clock as I facilitated meetings to keep the discussion on track. One of my goals was to end every meeting early, with 10 minutes to spare. This allowed the participants time for casual interaction with colleagues or some breathing room on the way to their next meeting. The added bonus: getting out early always put a smile on their faces.

The Wall Street Journal ran a story in November 2017 called “New Meeting Rules: Five Minutes, Max” by Sue Shellenbarger, with eyebrow-raising tactics for those frustrated with marathon meetings. She wrote: “Long-winded monologues and PowerPoints are out. There’s no time for small talk, and less tolerance for 30- or 60-minute meetings when five to 15 minutes will do. Participants must learn to distill their ideas and requests to the conference-room equivalent of an elevator pitch.”

Shellenbarger interviewed several CEOs for the article: Aaron Shapiro, a chief executive at Huge Inc.,

a digital agency in New York, who holds 5 minute meetings in huddles rather than booking a conference room. He also does “drive-bys” where he stops in at someone’s desk for a quick chat. Charlie Kim, CEO at Boston software developer 121Nexus, occasionally schedules what he jokingly calls a “lightning meeting” of which he says “has energy, it has action, people are shocked by it and everything about it truly moves.” Jack Skeels, CEO of Los Angeles-based management-training firm AgencyAgile, talked about the three-bounce rule. If two meeting participants run a discussion back and forth three times, the topic is tabled for future rescheduling.

Most surprising and humorous in the article was the tactic employed by one executive who has Oscar-style music queued up on her laptop. She is just one click away from signalling the end to someone’s conversational narcissism, not unlike the Oscars when a winner has talked for too long. I don’t recommend implementing that strategy, but it does illustrate how you can creatively think your way to fewer, shorter meetings!



What can I do to boost my productivity and offer more value to my team?

– *Looking for a Boost*

Judy: Rather than think about what you can do, let’s look at your question in reverse. Maybe what you *don’t* do may build your productivity in an unexpected way. In his new book, “When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing,” Dan Pink draws on research from psychology, biology, neuroscience and economics to deliver a compelling



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way to use your time to flourish in every area of your life.

Pink explores the different parts of the day, noting where the majority of individuals find their highs and lows of productivity. In chapter two, “Time Hackers Handbook,” he offers a menu of “Restorative Breaks.” Among them are:

- **Micro-breaks:** Pause and look at something 20 ft. away for 20 seconds, take a drink of water, stand up and stretch.
- **Moving breaks:** Take a 5 minute walk every hour, do a few yoga poses at your desk and, yes, maybe even a few push-ups.
- **Nature breaks:** Go outside for a short walk, or if you can’t spare the time, Pink says, “Pretend you’re outside...look at some indoor plants or the trees outside your window.”

If I don’t have time for a walk, I sometimes page through a book of nature photography. Within reach on my drawing table is a book titled, “Wise Trees” by Diane Cook and Len Jenshel. The authors spent two years traveling to 59 sites across five continents, photographing inspirational trees. The strength of these trees—often massive, filled with character and seemingly their own personalities—is captivating in itself. Research has shown that looking at images of trees contributes to wellbeing and cognitive functioning.

Taking time to pause throughout your day is a solid place to begin your quest to add value. As you experiment with this approach, you may notice that you can focus on your projects more easily when you return to work. From that benefit alone, you will undoubtedly see your productivity expand in new ways. As Dan Pink writes: “Sometimes the greatest course of action is...inaction.”

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