

Jim Schleckser

How to get yourself out of meetings.. And add valuable hours back to your week.



If you're like me, you probably have **more than one meeting** on your weekly or monthly calendar that you dread going to. The worst part is that you're not sure why you even continue to go. Most likely, you got invited to the meeting a long time ago when you were very needed, and you've been trapped into attending ever since--even when you know you have far **more valuable things you could be doing** with your time. The truth is, you're **not even needed in the meeting** anymore.

The good news is, there's an effective way to get out of that meeting and add some extra hours to your schedule as a result.

The Niceness Trap

The reason so many of us find ourselves trapped in meetings we don't want to be in comes down to the fact that we don't want to offend anyone. But there's a real cost to being nice. We wind up wasting hours of our life going to meetings we don't need to be at.

This is an especially difficult trap when you're a leader and other people want or even expect, you to attend. By choosing not to go, you risk creating the perception among other attendees that the meeting isn't important.

Here's how you can navigate that trap.

Mission-Critical Only

The first step you need to take is to evaluate the meetings you attend and make an objective analysis about the ones you are truly mission-critical to. Do you find yourself going to a regular update meeting? Not mission-critical. What about a meeting where you can just read the minutes to get all the information you need? Not mission-critical. If you're dealing with meetings where you are regularly asked to make decisions on the big objectives for the company, then yes, mission-critical.

Make your list and then circle all the ones that aren't mission-critical to prepare yourself for the next step.

Communicate One-On-One

Once you have identified the meetings you want to excuse yourself from, schedule some private conversations with the leaders and organizers of those

meetings to communicate with them that you no longer want to attend the meeting--while also explaining why. The key is to communicate that you still value the need for the meeting and that you trust this leader to continue moving forward. You also need to make it clear that you remain available to attend the meeting in the future on an ad-hoc basis when needed. Give them the chance to save face. The goal should be to empower this leader and let them know you fully trust them, and that you are simply making a call to free your time up for something even more valuable to the business.

Group Communications

Once you have established your exit plan with the leader of the meeting, your last step is to do something similar with the other attendees. Again, what you want to avoid is sending the message that this meeting isn't important. You can do that by sending the clear message in your final appearance at the meeting about why you're not attending the meeting going forward, that you truly appreciate all the work that everyone is doing, and that the meeting itself remains important to continue.

You should also convey that the leader of the meeting has your full trust and authority and that they speak for you when the meeting is



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in session. Again, make it clear that just because you're not going to be at the next meeting, that doesn't diminish the value of attendance for everyone else.

Stop Meeting Now

I know it might be difficult to imagine what life might be like if you stopped going to all those meetings you don't think you need to be at every week. Where could you invest the free time?

So, try and experiment and pick one meeting you have this week and try this technique. See if you can get an hour or two of time back that you can then invest in some other aspect of your business. If that goes well, try it again.

Trust me, when all is said and done, you'll thank me later when you recognize how much time you have won back for yourself.

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About the Author

Jim helps leaders grow companies. He specializes in the issues that fast growth firms experience in their business models, talent, processes and systems as they reach higher levels of performance. Jim and his team at the **Inc. CEO Project** work with over 100 CEOs of high growth companies to identify and obliterate the things that stand between them and continued organizational success.

With 30 years of leadership in business strategy, technology businesses, process improvement, organizational development, mergers and acquisitions, engineering, sales and marketing, he brings experience in leading global organizations in both public and private environments across many functional areas to the table. Jim has been quoted in *The New York Times*, *Time*, *The Huffington Post* and *National Public Radio*. His ideas have been translated into 9 languages and he has done business in over 26 countries.

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