

## *Long Meetings Video Transcript*

- I suppose what we dread most about meetings is that they take longer than planned. It almost doesn't matter what happens during the allotted time, but if they overrun, then they affect the rest of your day, and that's a real problem. You'd have to be pretty assertive to just walk out at the finished time, although you could. But you might not want to if the meeting is still about to cover something really important to you. So, you're forced to stay trapped in the meeting as it eats up your day and breaks into other appointments that you've booked. So, how do we stop this from happening?

**Well, I think we need to tackle all four causes of long or overrunning meetings, which are as follows.**

**First, too many people at the meeting.** Every extra person you invite makes the meeting take longer and become more boring because every subject and every discussion can't be 100% relevant to everyone, it's just inevitable. So, it's vital to keep the numbers down as much as you can, which might mean not inviting some people who came last time. Don't worry, they probably won't mind. And if the meeting's got too big, you could make the big meeting only occasional, quarterly, or something like that, and then have a smaller one more often, or even a couple of smaller ones to involve everyone, but in **smaller groups**.

**The second problem which causes long meetings is a weak leader, or even no leader appointed at all.** We've already seen that, even with a weak leader, there's quite a bit that any of the participants can do, pointing out red herrings or too much detail, pointing out bad behaviors, etc. But, still, **a strong leader for the meeting is pretty vital**. I think it's important to support them by all agreeing at the start that the leader is empowered to push people along, to cut conversations off if they get too long, and to call an end to an item if it's looking like it's not going to be resolved today.

**The third problem is an overambitious schedule, just too many items on the agenda and too short a time.** Certainly, there must be an agenda, and, ideally, it would have times on each agenda item, so that we can see if it looks doable, and then we can try to stick to it. And then we can learn from experience that we, as a group, can't plan the sales budget in 15 minutes. We know that last time it took three hours. You could give someone the job of noting down how long each agenda item actually takes. **But the main thing is to demand an agenda with timings and then to question the timing if they don't look achievable. And**

**then, finally, to monitor and point out if we're drifting behind the schedule.** Things like, "Guys, we took 10 minutes too much "on that last item, so we're now 20 minutes behind. "Can we do this next item in only 15 minutes, do you think?" And, by the way, if you want to know more about agendas, I've made a whole separate course on them.

**My final cause of long meetings and meetings overrunning is when everything's going fine and then you just get bogged down on one item.** Often, it's the most unexpected thing, something you thought would be small and easy, but, somehow, it just becomes difficult to resolve, and then all your hard-earned time is suddenly slipping away. So, what can you do when this happens? **Well, first, if you've got times on the agenda, you'll know it's a problem, and you can point that out.** This item should've taken us 10 minutes and we've already had 15. Next is to summarize the pros and cons, so that we don't keep bouncing around between them. In fact, if the meeting has a lot of time pressure, it can be good, with each agenda item, to summarize what we already know before the discussion is even opened. Then, if we still can't agree the item could be parked, either to come back to at the end, or for a separate meeting to address, maybe with a different mix of people. I don't like just putting it onto next week's meeting, because I think the same stalemates will come up again. There's a manager who I know who says, "If you can't decide as a group, "then I'll decide, and you don't want that." And this always makes the group decide. Two final thoughts. One is that if you **have the meeting standing up, perhaps around a high table,** then it will go faster. Not really because people's feet get tired, but more because our brains work faster when we're standing up, for some reason. **The other is that you could set up a cost of meetings clock.** I Googled it, it was easy to find one. And this is where you put in the number of people and the approximate average pay double for the cost of employing people. And it'll probably tell you that the meeting is costing something like \$300 per hour, which is quite shocking, it's \$5 a minute. And you can see the money just ticking away as the meeting goes round in circles or off onto tangents. In fact, you can just use a normal counting down timer for each item or for the meeting as a whole, to keep people aware of time. If you just Google the word timer, you can get one up on your laptop and then maybe project it up onto the big screen, so that everyone is constantly reminded that we've only got two minutes left on this item, or we've only got 20 minutes left for the whole meeting. I've used this quite often and it's fun, it's a challenge for everyone to keep to it, and it certainly keeps the talkative people under control.

**So, for your long meetings, the problem may be the number of people, the leader being weak, the agenda being overambitious or not timed, or the inability to cope with getting bogged down. And, based on that, what's your plan for dealing with it? Use the notetaking tool to answer these questions.**