

# When Coronavirus Causes You To Meet Differently: 6 Tips For Making The Most Of Remote Or In-Person Meetings



When the coronavirus causes you to meet differently, here's how to be successful.

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Today's climate—driven by fears and precautions surrounding coronavirus—is leading to “social distancing.” An increasing number of people are being forced to work from home or away from the office either because of self-quarantine, companies asking people to work from home or children who aren't in school and, therefore, require care. Given this new way of working, meetings are changing as well. More meetings are taking place to talk about the impact of COVID-19 on business and a greater number of meetings are happening virtually.

This is the point where we roll our eyes and agree the average work day just includes way too many meetings. So, how can you be selective about which meetings you attend, be as productive as possible in the ones which require your involvement, and stay engaged if you're participating on a remote basis?

First, know meetings are indeed a problem. [Doodle conducted research](#) with 500 U.S. employees including 100 VPs and 400 non-executives and found:

- People spend a lot of time in meetings. 32% of executives and 21% of employees spend 20 hours or more in meetings each week.
- People are distracted. 25% of employees have seen colleagues watch videos, take selfies or fall asleep in meetings.
- People are multi-tasking. 58% of employees have seen teammates send a text, leave the meeting to take another call or work on other tasks during a meeting.

Perhaps it's not a surprise people are distracted or multi-tasking since many meetings are unnecessary or unproductive. The research also showed 59% of executives reported they were involved in meetings where they didn't really have to attend and 60% of employees reported they attended meetings that didn't accomplish anything. “The findings from our report made it clear that today's companies are struggling with how to address the negative impact of ineffective meetings,” says Renato Profico, CEO of Doodle.

All that eye-rolling we do about meetings seems to be justified. So, how can you make meetings matter and ensure they are more effective? Try these five tips:

**First, acknowledge new needs for meetings.** If coronavirus and COVID-19 have caused you to do more work on a remote basis, meetings may actually be more relevant than usual in order to keep people connected, communicating and in the know about key top-

ics and decisions. While meetings may be less necessary when you're running into colleagues in the office anyway, they may be more necessary in cases where the connections aren't happening as automatically during the work day.

**Choose well.** Be selective about which meetings you attend. Ask yourself if the topic of the meeting will matter next week or next year. Also, explore whether you're the person who needs to attend—do you have a unique perspective that is critical to contribute? Consider whether you're redundant. For example, if you and a co-worker are both scheduled to attend, could one of you forgo involvement so you can divide and conquer? Ensure you're not attending just because of fear of missing out (FOMO). Avoid meetings where you're only there to be sure you don't miss anything. Instead, ask a colleague to update you as necessary after the session.

**Focus on the meeting content.** Sometimes this can be hard—especially if your device is competing for your attention. If you're at an in-person meeting, put the lid of your laptop down and store your smartphone out of sight. [Research](#) published in *Social Psychology* found the presence of a cell phone—even if it wasn't in use—was distracting. On the other hand, if you're suddenly working from home because of COVID-19 or the coronavirus, you may want to use video conferencing to a greater extent. Being on video can keep people more accountable and less likely to multi-task since they're more visible to others in the meeting. In addition, practice active listening during a meeting by thinking about the content and contributing to the discussion. Even taking notes can be helpful to ensure you stay engaged.

**Manage the meeting structure.** The most productive meetings have a clear desired outcome, an established agenda and clarity on next steps. “Having a tight attendee list, coupled with expectations about outcomes can be an easy fix for improved collaboration and quick-decision making,” according to Profico. If you're the meeting owner, ensure you manage meetings with these in mind and if you're not the meeting owner, request these meeting practices in order to make the best use of everyone's time.

**Push back.** Standing meetings offer perhaps the best examples of the worst meetings, so ask whether they are really necessary. If they add value by keeping people in the loop and advancing the project, keep them. But if they become a habit that simply wastes time, it is time to reassess. Perhaps the meeting should still stand but be less frequent or include fewer people. Or perhaps the standing meetings should be cancelled, and the group can be called together as needed.

**Finally, hold meetings in spaces that work and with technology that performs.** Technology should enhance processes whether you're using it in-person or to connect remote participants. For meetings where people are physically present, chairs should support employees ergonomically, rooms should be big enough to accommodate the whole group and set-ups should provide choices for standing or sitting during the meeting. Even having daylight or views from the room can enhance the quality of a meeting.

We're facing new conditions for work based on the coronavirus and COVID-19. Whether precautions about these are causing more meetings, remote meetings or general concerns about how we gather, it's important to be intentional about meeting effectively and making meetings matter. Appreciate the legitimate need for meetings, be selective about the meetings you attend, focus when you're there and minimize multi-tasking as much as possible. In addition, manage the meeting structure and be judicious about holding and attending standing meetings. Finally, pay attention to the places you're meeting and the technology that supports your connections. These considerations will surely pay off and when they do, they may make all our eye-rolling about meetings a bit less justified. That would be a relief!

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