

MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

My Job Is Mostly Meetings About More Meetings

How to Reclaim Your Day from a Calendar Full of Rectangles



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRO	1
Chapter 1 - Your Calendar Is Not Your Job	7
Chapter 2 - Why Meetings Multiply	15
Chapter 3 - You Keep Saying Yes	24
Chapter 4 - Fake Solutions That Make It Worse.....	34
Chapter 5 - Stop Meeting to Report the Weather.....	45
Chapter 6 - Everyone Does Not Need to Be There	57
Chapter 7 - The One-Hour Default Is Lying to You	70
Chapter 8 - Stop Using Meetings as Anxiety Medication....	82
Chapter 9 - Decide Before You Invite	96
Chapter 10 - Build a Calendar That Can Breathe.....	110
Chapter 11 - Turn Updates into Decisions	124
Chapter 12 - Run the Meeting Like It Owes You Money	138
Chapter 13 - Replace the Meeting with Something Better..	152
Chapter 14 - The Two-Week Meeting Reset	167
Chapter 15 - What If Your Boss Loves Meetings?	183
Chapter 16 - When the New System Breaks	196
Chapter 17 - What If Everyone Else Keeps Scheduling You?	212
Chapter 18 - Notice the Relapse Early	227
Chapter 19 - Make Fewer Meetings the Normal Way of Working	243
Chapter 20 - Your Job Is Still the Work.....	258

INTRO

At 9:00 a.m., you join a meeting to prepare for the 11:00 a.m. meeting. The 11:00 a.m. meeting exists because yesterday's meeting ended with the conclusion that "we should align separately." At 1:30 p.m., there is a follow-up to clarify what was decided at 11:00, which is useful because nobody is entirely sure anything was decided. By 3:00, you are in a meeting called "Quick Sync," a title that has the same relationship to reality as "light refreshments" at an airport hotel.

Somewhere between the fourth rectangle on your calendar and the fifth person saying, "I'll give everyone five minutes back," you remember that you technically have a job.

Not meetings. A job.

There are tasks attached to it. Work that requires concentration, judgment, writing, planning, analysis, designing, selling, building, fixing, deciding, or occasionally staring at a spreadsheet until it confesses. You would like to do this work. In fact, you may even be evaluated on whether you do it. Unfortunately, your calendar has been colonized by discussions about the work, updates on the work, preparation for the work, reviews of why the work is late, and one recurring meeting devoted to improving the process by which everyone discusses the work.

The work itself has been asked to wait in the lobby.

This is how a normal workday becomes a strange corporate escape room. You begin with eight hours. Someone takes thirty minutes for a team check-in. Another person needs forty-five minutes to "touch base." A project requires an hour. Then comes a cross-functional sync, a stakeholder

review, a status call, a planning session, and a meeting to make sure everyone is ready for the planning session. Lunch becomes something you eat while muted. The only open space on your calendar is 4:30 to 5:00, which is apparently when the human brain is expected to produce its finest strategic thinking.

Naturally, that is when someone sends, "Got 15 mins?"

The meeting problem is sneaky because meetings are not automatically bad. Some are necessary. Some save time. Some prevent expensive mistakes. Some allow five people to make a decision in twenty minutes instead of exchanging forty-seven emails, three spreadsheets, and a message that says, "Circling back on this." A good meeting can be efficient, clarifying, even energizing.

The problem is that bad meetings wear the same clothes.

They have calendar invitations. They have agendas, sometimes. They contain serious-looking adults. They use respectable verbs like align, review, discuss, connect, socialize, cascade, ideate, and my personal favorite, workshop, which can mean anything from "make an important decision" to "stare at a slide while Greg explains a box."

Because meetings look like work, they are difficult to challenge. If you spend six hours in calls, nobody can accuse you of doing nothing. You were extremely busy. Your webcam has evidence. You nodded thoughtfully at least eleven times. You said, "That makes sense," even when it did not. You may have written down three action items, two of which are to attend more meetings.

Busy has been achieved.

Useful is still under investigation.

The deeper problem is not simply that there are too many meetings. It is that calendars gradually become default decision-making systems. Something feels important, so somebody schedules time. Something feels unclear, so somebody schedules time. Somebody wants visibility, so everybody schedules time. Nobody wants to make a decision alone, so twelve people are invited to witness the decision forming in captivity.

This creates a very expensive form of emotional reassurance.

A meeting can make us feel that progress is happening because people are present. But presence is not progress. Talking about a blocked project does not unblock it unless the conversation leads to a decision, an owner, a next step, or information that changes what someone does. Otherwise, it is just professionally formatted concern.

And concern has excellent calendar integration.

There is another reason the problem survives: refusing meetings feels socially dangerous. Decline too many and you worry you will look unhelpful, uninformed, disengaged, difficult, or mysteriously “not collaborative.” So you accept. Then you sit through forty-five minutes of material that could have been six bullet points because declining felt riskier than losing the time.

This book is not going to tell you to become the office hermit who answers every invitation with “No.” That would certainly clear your calendar, although possibly in the same way quitting clears your calendar. The goal is not fewer meetings at any cost. The goal is to recover control over your day without becoming the person everyone describes as “very efficient” immediately before adding “but exhausting.”

We are going to separate necessary meetings from habitual ones, identify why your calendar keeps reproducing like a confused family of rabbits, and build simple ways to reduce, shorten, combine, decline, redesign, or replace meetings. You will learn how to tell whether a meeting actually needs to exist, how to push for decisions instead of endless discussion, how to protect focus time without writing a manifesto, and how to escape recurring meetings that have outlived the project, the purpose, and possibly several employees.

You will also learn what to do when you are not the boss.

This matters because most meeting advice becomes suspiciously easy if you control everybody's calendar. "Simply cancel all unnecessary meetings," says the executive who can cancel all unnecessary meetings. Excellent. Next week: how to reduce traffic by owning the highway.

For normal people, the solution needs to work with managers, clients, colleagues, office politics, hybrid work, remote teams, and that one person who considers a twelve-minute voice note "more efficient." You need methods that are practical enough to use on Tuesday, not principles that sound magnificent in a conference keynote and collapse when your boss sends a mandatory invite titled "Alignment on Alignment."

We will start small. You do not need to delete half your calendar tomorrow. You do not need a new productivity system, a special planner, or an app that creates a dashboard showing how much time you spend looking at dashboards. You need to understand which meetings are costing you real work, which ones can be fixed, and which ones are basically ceremonial.

Then you need permission to act accordingly.

Not emotional permission from the universe. Practical permission from evidence, clear communication, and a better alternative.

By the end, the goal is not an empty calendar. An empty calendar is not the point unless your profession is lighthouse keeper. The goal is a calendar that reflects your actual priorities, contains meetings with a reason to exist, and leaves enough uninterrupted time for you to do the work everyone keeps meeting about.

Because if your entire job is discussing the work, eventually somebody may ask a deeply uncomfortable question.

Who is doing the work?

Wklejony tekst

Chapter 1 - Your Calendar Is Not Your Job

At 8:57 a.m., you open your laptop with a beautiful idea: today you will finally finish the thing.

You know the thing. The presentation that has been “almost done” for three days. The proposal waiting for actual thinking. The analysis nobody else can complete because the important part lives inside your head. You have coffee, a reasonable amount of optimism, and exactly three minutes before the first meeting.

At 9:00, the calendar takes over.

The first meeting is a team update. At 9:30, you have a project sync. At 10:00, somebody wants to review a document that nobody has read because everybody has been in meetings. At 11:00, there is a stakeholder call. At noon, lunch exists theoretically. At 12:30, someone has placed thirty minutes on your calendar to “pick your brain,” which sounds unpleasant but apparently remains legal.

By 2:00 p.m., you have been working for five hours and have done approximately seventeen minutes of the thing.

This is the first trap: a full calendar creates the emotional experience of a full workday.

You are tired. You have participated. You have spoken. You have listened. You have made decisions about fonts, timelines, responsibilities, next steps, previous steps, and whether another meeting should be scheduled. Your brain feels used. Your battery agrees. So when the real work is still sitting there at 4:45, it feels unfair.

Haven't you already been working all day?

Yes.

That is precisely the problem.

Meetings are work, but they are not automatically the work that produces the result your job ultimately requires. A surgeon can spend all day discussing surgery and still, at some point, somebody may reasonably expect surgery to occur. A salesperson can spend six hours in internal calls and discover that customers remain surprisingly unmoved by the company's excellent internal alignment.

Your job contains two broad categories of activity: coordination and production.

Coordination is everything that helps people understand, decide, sequence, inform, assign, review, or unblock. Meetings often live here. Production is the actual creation of the value your role exists to produce: writing, building, selling, designing, analyzing, negotiating, planning, solving, coding, preparing, deciding, or delivering.

You need both.

The trouble begins when coordination eats production and then schedules a meeting to discuss why production is behind.

This happens because coordination is easier to see. A meeting appears on a calendar. It has attendees. It starts and ends. Production often looks suspiciously like one person staring at a screen while occasionally deleting a sentence and muttering.

From the outside, meetings look active.

Thinking looks like you may be checking sports scores.

So calendars become accidental performance theater. If every hour is booked, you look needed. If two hours are

blocked for focused work, somebody may view that space as available because you are apparently doing nothing more urgent than your actual job.

This is how work becomes something you do between work.

The first step is to stop treating your calendar as a neutral record of your day. It is not. Your calendar is a resource allocation system. Every rectangle is making a claim on your attention, energy, and output.

A sixty-minute meeting is not merely sixty minutes.

It may require preparation. It may leave you with follow-up work. It may break a ninety-minute concentration block into two useless fragments. It may force lunch later. It may turn a task requiring deep thought into something you attempt at 5:20 while your brain is already putting on its coat.

A meeting from 10:00 to 10:30 can quietly destroy the useful part of 9:30 to 11:00.

The calendar says thirty minutes.

Your nervous system has submitted a different invoice.

To see what is actually happening, do not begin by canceling anything. Begin by measuring.

For one normal workweek, look at your calendar and classify each meeting into one of four categories:

decision;

information;

collaboration;

habit.

A decision meeting exists because a decision genuinely needs several people at the same time. A collaboration

meeting requires real-time interaction because people are solving, designing, negotiating, or working through something together. An information meeting exists mainly to transfer information. A habit meeting exists because the meeting existed last week and has developed tenancy rights.

This simple classification is more useful than asking, "Was the meeting important?"

Everything at work is important if described by the person who scheduled it.

The weekly update is important. The steering committee is important. The status sync is important. The pre-read review is important. Greg's thirty-minute walkthrough of a spreadsheet he emailed yesterday is apparently part of national infrastructure.

Instead ask what function the meeting performs.

If ten people attend a meeting mostly to hear updates, you have identified an information transfer problem wearing business casual.

If six people gather because one person needs approval from one manager, you may have a decision-path problem.

If the same group meets every Tuesday at 10:00 with no clear output except surviving until 10:45, you have discovered habit.

Habit is especially dangerous because recurring meetings stop having to justify themselves. They were once created for a reason. The reason may have disappeared in March. The invitation remains, immortal and optimistic.

Recurring meetings are the office equivalent of a subscription you forgot to cancel.

Only more expensive.