# **2.5 –** **TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR MEETING SCHEDULE**

# Hi there, everybody. If you want to get all of your colleagues, everybody in the organization, to agree on one thing, you can pretty much all agree that there's more time wasted in meetings than there should be. Meetings are the bane of the corporate world in this day and age. In a survey reported by Industry Week, 2,000 managers claimed that 30% of their time spent in meetings was wasted time. According to a 3M Meeting Network survey of executives, 25 to 50% of the time people spend in meetings was wasted. Those may not have surprised you at all, but the one that really bothers me and makes me want to just shout from the rooftops is the Clarizen/Harris Interactive Survey that found that 67% of those surveyed say that they're spending up to four hours a week getting ready for status update meetings. That's 10% of their work week just getting ready to update people, not doing anything additive to the organization and the operation. Here's the thing. A lot of hate is going around in regards to meetings, and it's misplaced. Meetings are a resource and a tool to get things done. Meetings are great when they are used right, but like any tool or resource, they can be misused. So in this lesson you're going to take back some of the control of your meeting schedule to make your time there more effective and to gain more time in your day. You're going to use the four halves to do this. To explain this first half, and we'll just dive right in, I use the old saying, and that is: When all you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail. Meetings aren't the only way to get things done. They're not the only way to foster collaboration. So your first half is to actually have half the meetings that you do on your calendar. Now that may seem shocking. That may seem absolutely outrageous. But when you open yourself up to the possibility and open others up to the possibility, there are a lot of options available. The first option is to simply ask the question: Do we really need to have a meeting about this? Could an email suffice? Could we open up a Skype or a Slack session to have a discussion on it? What about just a phone call between the two real stakeholders in this? Just open up the option. Don't let meetings be the default for everything that you're doing. The second way to tackle this is: Are there recurring meetings whose usefulness is probably past? You might have had a standing meeting every week to talk about inventory in January because inventory levels were crazy. But here it is in May or June and you're still having that weekly inventory meeting even though inventory isn't an issue anymore. Maybe you can cancel those recurring meetings. Maybe you can reschedule them to have it every other week, quarterly instead of monthly, monthly instead of weekly, something

# like that. Or, maybe you fold those recurring meetings into another meeting. Maybe you take two

# and make them just one half hour meeting. The third way to tackle this is: Are there update meetings that could be replaced by email? This happens a lot in regards to reports, where somebody puts together a report and then they share it and everybody discusses it in a 10-person meeting. Could it be that they just email that report out? Could it be that they just email their updates out? Again, meetings aren't necessarily the best place for collaboration. It is a tool and a resource to be used effectively. When you feel your resolve waning on this, because I know this is tough for a lot of you, remember the statistics we talked about right at the beginning of this lesson. Everyone's aware that meeting time is often wasted, so they are looking for a chance to get out of meetings or to cut them down. The second half that we're going to be talking about is actually cutting your meeting times in half. There's no sense using a sledgehammer to drive in a nail when a hammer would do the job just fine. Remember Parkinson's law. That states that the work expands to fill the time allotted. A little pressure and focus in your meetings might get you better results. People want to focus on that purpose. They don't want to be going off on tangents in those meetings. Heck, remember the last three meetings that you were in and how much time was wasted in that meeting. You can get that time back. 30 or 60 minutes might be the default meeting time in Outlook, but why? You can set that up to be a 15-minute meeting, a 20-minute meeting. Instead of 60 minutes, make it a 40-minute meeting. You can change those things to match the purpose and the outcome that you're looking for in that particular meeting. Here's the other trick on meetings, short meetings that is. If you have a 15-minute meeting, people aren't nearly as likely to show up late to that meeting because they're missing a higher percentage of that time. The third half that we're going to be talking about is to cut the participation in the meetings by half. I don't mean how much people talk; I mean the actual participants in that meeting. Using the tool example again, you can hang a picture with 20 nails but one nail is probably all that you need. Meetings decline in value for each participant, the more participants that there are in the meeting. How many meetings have you missed and were summed up in less than a minute by somebody who actually attended? My goodness, how much time did you just save not being in that 60-minute meeting and getting updated in a minute or two minutes? If people aren't adding to the discussion, then they can probably just get that one-minute summary at the end. Which brings up a very aggressive point in regards to participation, and that is, as a leader, sending a representative to a meeting instead of going yourself. Again, very aggressive, but as long as they are empowered to make decisions on your behalf and on the behalf of the department, then there's somebody there and that is an appropriate use of your time, their time, and everybody who is in that meeting. The fourth half

# that we're going to talk about is, again, another tough one. That is to leave half of the meetings

# when you should. How many 30-minute meetings have you better there for 60 minutes? How many meetings took five minutes instead of 30 minutes and you stuck around for the entire 30 minutes? That's what I'm talking about. Leave when the discussion is over. "Hey, I've got to run to fill in the blank." Or just leave on time. One of the ways to do this is to actually let the meeting organizer know ahead of time that you have a hard stop after 30 minutes, 60 minutes. Maybe you have another meeting. Maybe you've scheduled a one on one. Maybe you just need to come up with some sort of excuse. Remember, this isn't about just reducing meetings. This is about making your time in meetings more important. Yes, I get it, you could probably save five to 10 hours a week by applying all of these principles. Your exercises this week is to apply each one of these principles to one meeting this week. Recommend avoiding a meeting. Reduce the time in one of the meetings. Cut the participation in one of the meetings. And leave a meeting at the scheduled time or when you should be leaving the meeting. There's space in your workbook to write up to three meetings that are possibilities for each one of these tactics. Fill it out and then pick one for this week. Pick the easiest one. Next week you'll practice and move to the next one, and the week after that you'll move onto the third one. Imagine cutting the time you spend in meetings for each of these by half every single week. For most of us, that could really happen. You just have to apply yourself, and it's not going to happen if you don't take action. Thanks so much, everybody.