

“Death By Meeting”
Patrick Lencioni
Notes by Dave Kraft

The hard truth is, bad meetings almost always lead to bad decisions... (viii) “I think people would just like to stick with one thing for a while, and focus on quality...” – Matt McKenna (22) You guys spend more time getting less done and avoiding anything remotely interesting... (85) Every time you guys are on the verge of getting into a crucial conversation about something that might get heated, you seem to bail out. (116) Will explained. “Everyone, but especially you, as the leader of the group, needs to be looking for places where people have different opinions but aren’t necessarily putting them out there. You need to be constantly mining for buried conflict.” “What’s the alternative?”

Not resolving it and having people come back in six months and say, ‘Well, I never really agreed with that decision when we talked about it before?’ (122) But the point is, consensus is usually not achievable. The likelihood of six intelligent people coming to a sincere and complete agreement on a complex and important topic is very low.” “So what do you do?” Michelle wondered. “You have a passionate, unfiltered, messy, provocative discussion that ends when the leader of the team decides all the information has been aired. At that point, if no one has made a compelling enough argument for making a decision, the leader breaks the tie.” Once the decision is made, everyone supports it.” (123) “I’d rather spend three hours on something and come to the right decision than spend one hour and get nowhere.” (125) “Let’s take an issue and see if we can’t mine it for conflict.” (126) “We are trying to accomplish too many things during these painful Monday morning meetings, and we’re not doing any of them successfully.” (139)

“Yeah, the urge to go off on some terribly interesting and important conversation that has no real impact on your ability to accomplish your near-term goals.” (159) “And trying to deal with strategic issues during the weekly meetings usually means you get distracted and don’t deal with any of the short-term issues that you really need to resolve if you’re going to keep the business moving.” (160) “How many topics can you take on during these Monthly Strategics?” Will didn’t hesitate. “One or two. Maybe three if you set aside enough time. The key is to pick the right ones, and really get your hands around them.” (161)

Daily Check-in ← Daily Headline News (5 min)

Weekly Tactical ← Weekly Sitcom/Crime Drama (1 hr)

Monthly Strategic ← Movie (2 hrs)

Quarterly Off-site Review ← Mini-series (6 hrs or more) (167)

“The Quarterly Off-Site Review is a critical chance to step back from the daily, weekly, monthly grind, and review things from a distance.” “Review what?” For the first time, Will read directly from his notes. “Well, strategy. The competitive landscape. Morale. The dynamics of the executive team. Top performers. Bottom performers. Customer satisfaction. Pretty much everything that has a long-term impact on the success of the company. Stuff you just can’t cover in weekly or monthly meetings.” (169) “Our Weekly Tactical meeting. That’s where we review our numbers, find out what everyone’s doing, and solve tactical problems so we can keep moving forward.” (195) They learned to distinguish between topics that could be addressed by a subset of the team... (214)

First, meetings are boring. Second, and even more important, meetings are ineffective. (223) *Meetings are ineffective because they lack contextual structure.* ...the participants have a hard time figuring out whether they’re supposed to be debating, voting, brainstorming, weighing in, or just listening. To make our meetings more effective, we need to have multiple types of meetings, and clearly distinguish between the various purposes, formats, and timing of those meetings. (224) I’m encouraging leaders of meetings, as well as participants, to be miners of conflict. It is both natural and productive for disagreement to occur. (229) And I believe far more suffering is caused by failing to deal with an issue directly—and whispering about it in the hallways—than by putting it on the table and wrestling with it head on. (230)

Meeting #1: The Daily check-In (235)

Meeting #2: The Weekly Tactical ...on tactical issues of immediate concern. ...run with a sense of discipline and structural consistency. (237) *The Lightning Round Progress Review* (238) *Real-Time Agenda* ...avoid the temptation to prepare an agenda. While this might mean sacrificing some control, it ensures that the meeting will be relevant and effective. Tactical issues that must be addressed to ensure that short-term objectives are not in jeopardy.(239) During the Weekly Tactical, there are two overriding goals: resolution of issues and reinforcement of clarity. *Inevitable Challenges* ...one of them is the temptation to set an agenda ahead of time... ...too much detail during the lightning round. Hold team members to sixty seconds during the lightning round... While these are both important problems to be aware of, by far the most common and dangerous challenge in making Weekly Tacticals work is the temptation to get into *discussions about long-term strategic issues*. (240) Limiting Weekly Tactical meetings to specific, short-term topics .

Meeting #3: The Monthly Strategic (241) ...at least two hours per topic... (242) The most obvious challenge in implementing Monthly Strategic meetings (or the ad hoc variety) is the *failure to schedule enough time* for them. A related challenge has to do with *putting too many items on the agenda*. (243) The key to avoiding both of these challenges is to ensure that more than enough time is scheduled for each issue. Another challenge in making strategic meetings work is *the failure to do research and preparation* ahead of time. Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention a final challenge: *the fear of conflict*. (244)

Meeting #4: The Quarterly Off-Site Review *Topics to Cover ~Comprehensive*

Strategy Review: Executives should reassess their strategic direction, not every day as so many do, but three or four times a year. (245) *Team Review Personnel Review Competitive and Industry Review* (246) One of the challenges is *the tendency to overburden and over-structure the meetings*, which usually takes the form of tightly scheduled slide presentations and lengthy informational sermons. The purpose of a Quarterly Off-Site Review is to reflect on and discuss the state of the organization... Another challenge is the temptation to make these meetings *too much of a boondoggle* by having them at exotic locations that require extensive travel, and by including too many social activities.

One of the most important reasons for having off-sites: improving team unity. (247) And so, when we fail to get clarity and alignment during meetings, we set in motion a colossal wave of human activity as executives and their direct reports scramble to figure out what everyone else is doing and why. (251)...intelligent people cannot see the correlation between failing to take the time to get clarity, closure, and buy-in during a meeting... (252)