

3 Reasons To Make Your Next Meeting Tech Free



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Visualize the last meeting you attended. Was one-quarter of the room attentive and listening, while the remaining 75 percent of attendees attempted to act engaged as they shifted focus back and forth from the presenter to their laptops? I found this behavior increasingly common in my own meetings over the past year. While I previously dismissed this common meeting ritual as multitasking, subconsciously I knew that some of these folks were simply bored and catching up on the latest news about *Game of Thrones*. A few months ago, I decided to put an end to this distraction altogether by making our management and creative meetings tech free.

For the handful of participants working on their laptop or smartphone, I could certainly relate to email inundation and work overload. With potentially hundreds of incoming emails each day, hour-long meetings may seem like the perfect time to knock out a few email replies or even a sales proposal. Here are three reasons I concluded why it's not, and why your laptop and devices shouldn't even be in the room with you:

1. Writing notes down is better for retention.

Recent [studies](#) provide evidence that the physical process of writing notes down versus typing them improves memory and your ability to answer conceptual questions. Some note-takers may argue that they can type faster than they can write, but this is a situation where more is not better. When your focus is on typing notes on a tablet or laptop, your mind shifts from processing the content to simply transcribing it. The lack of engagement while you transcribe, essentially shifts your brain into autopilot. While you'll have a lot of notes typed up at the end of the meeting, it's likely you weren't a valuable contributor nor will you remember the details of the meeting without reviewing your notes. At BookPal we equip all employees with personalized journals to bring to meetings for note taking. Journals are an easy to use tool for recording information swiftly and efficiently in order to conduct appropriate follow-ups and recall pertinent details.

2. Multitasking is detrimental to productivity.

Despite research concluding that it's difficult to switch focus between tasks, there are still a lot of people who argue that they are the exception. Are you one of those people? Meeting participants who jump between email replies and engaging in the meeting are unable to focus closely on either task. They are either tuned out of the meeting, or not paying close attention to that email they are about to send. The end result is poorer performance and a likelihood of mistakes. In order to perform at your best, the solution is to properly focus your attention on a single task and schedule time to catch up on other

work. If you feel overwhelmed with your workload, I'd recommend David Allen's recently updated edition of [*Getting Things Done*](#), a great guide for "stress-free productivity." We recently added a few copies to our corporate library and Allen's tips have already made a positive impact on the team.

3. Technology use affects people's perceptions of you.

A recent [study](#) concluded that 76 percent of employees perceived checking emails or texts during a business meeting as unacceptable. The problem for the digital note-taker is that other meeting participants don't know what you are working on. All they can see is your focus changing from presenter to screen. This, of course, is more problematic for those attempting to record notes on a smart phone device, but its easily extendable to people using tablets and laptops. The solution starts at the top. If you manage others, set a good example by not bringing devices to meetings. I will acknowledge this is extremely easy to say and very difficult to do. On more than one occasion I've walked back to my office to drop off my phone so I wouldn't be tempted to check email and texts during important meetings, but I've learned that leading by example has resulted in tremendous payoff.

Due to the productivity boost from being tech free, we were able to reduce our weekly 90-minute executive meeting to just one hour. Regardless of whether you are working on a tablet or laptop to record notes, checking devices at the door improves outcomes. Tech free meetings create an environment where all attendees can focus on the objectives. This is especially important for meetings with creative goals like brainstorming sessions, problem resolution meetings or strategic planning sessions. Without the distraction of devices, participants will be significantly more engaged in the process. And for those attendees that really can't get away from other work, consider leaving them out of the meeting if it's not the best use of their time.

If the prospect of having to tell participants to check their devices at the door may be daunting, there are ways to ask politely without stepping on any toes. The key is to clearly communicate and set the example. Before committing to a lifetime of tech free meetings, just challenge yourself to hold your next meeting tech free and see how it goes.

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