

BORING  
MEETINGS

SUCK

GET **MORE** OUT OF  
YOUR MEETINGS, OR GET  
**OUT** OF MORE MEETINGS

≡ JON PETZ ≡

# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Foreword](#)

[Agenda Item 1: Boring Meetings Suck . . . so Why Do We Have 'Em?](#)

[Hey, Not All Meetings Suck](#)

[Nothing More Boring Than a Boring Book about Boring Meetings](#)

[What's in It for You?](#)

[How Do You Use This Book? Jump in and Read the Agenda Item You Need](#)

[Are You Ready to Make Meetings Rock?](#)

[Agenda Item 2: Better Meetings and Conventions through Technology . . . but Please Proceed with Caution](#)

[The Very Basics](#)

[Enhanced Meeting Technologies](#)

[For the More Adventurous](#)



*For the Outright Daring*

*Agenda Item 3: How to Be a Meeting Superhero . . . in 10 Minutes or Less*

*Part 1: New Meeting Styles*

*Part 2: Speed Meetings*

*Agenda Item 4: Why Everyday Office Meetings Suck . . . Skip This and You're Screwed*

*Your Preparation Sucks*

*Having No Agenda Sucks*

*Your Follow-Up Sucks*

*Scheduling a Meeting Sucks*

*Warning: Problem Solving at 8 AM and 6 PM Sucks*

*The Overinvitation Sucks*

*Starting Late Sucks*

*"Dogs Who Get Off the Leash" Suck*

*Conference Rooms Suck*

*Agenda Item 5: Your Presentation Sucks . . . Really, Yours Sucks*

*PowerPoint Sucks*

*"Um...aah" Sucks*

*PowerPoint Really Sucks*

*Monotone Speeches and Movements Suck*

*Unreadable Slides Suck*

*Cutesy Moving Graphics Suck*

**Agenda Item 6: Make the Best of Sucky Meetings . . . or Get Out While You Can**

**Never-Ending Meetings Suck**

**Déjà Meetings Suck**

**Project and Update Meetings Suck**

**Scattered Showers' Meetings Suck**

**Conference Calls Suck**

**Sales Team Meetings Suck**

**Online or Virtual Meetings Suck**

**Videoconferencing Sucks**

**Friday Meetings Suck**

**Agenda Item 7: Big Meetings Suck Even Bigger . . . Get Some Help or Suffer the Consequences**

**Poorly Planned Meetings Suck**

**Annual Meetings, Conventions,**

**Teambuilding, and Company Retreats Suck**

**Bad Audio Sucks**

**Distractions Suck**

**Guest Speakers Suck**

**No Introduction and Bad Introductions Suck**

**Bad Emcees Suck**

**Agenda Item 8: Heed This . . . or Continue to Suck for the Next Millennium**

**Consider Not Having One**  
**What You Can Do When Stuck in a Boring**  
**Meeting**  
**Conclusion**

**Acknowledgments**

**About the Author**

**Index**

# BORING MEETINGS SUUCK

GET MORE OUT OF  
YOUR MEETINGS, OR GET  
OUT OF MORE MEETINGS

≡ JON PETZ ≡



WILEY

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Copyright © 2011 by Jon Petz. All rights reserved.  
Bore No More!™ is a registered trademark of Jon Petz ©  
2010.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New  
Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600, or on the web at [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or

any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:***

Petz, Jon.

Boring meetings suck: get more out of your meetings, or get out of more meetings / Jon Petz.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-118-00462-3 (cloth)

ISBN 978-1-118-04382-0 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-118-04383-7 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-118-04384-4 (ebk)

1. Business meetings. I. Title.

HF5734.5.P475 2011

658.4 056—dc22

2010049550



*Boring Meetings Suck is dedicated to the ladies who allow my wonderful life to have meaning and not suck: Stacey, Sydney, Mackenzie, and Madison.*

*It is also dedicated to all those like-minded souls who have ever been in meetings that were a colossal waste of time, energy, creativity, and money and are willing to do something about it.*

*I further dedicate this to three special people who have made a tremendous impact on my personal and professional life in ways greater than they ever will realize. Thank you, Larry and Cindy H., and Jeffrey D.*

# ***Foreword***

What's that loud sucking sound?

Oh...it's your MEETING.

You'd think you'd know by now.

Meetings suck.

And BORING meetings?

They suck the most.

When Jon Petz and I began collaborating on the original version of this book in 2006, we decided to poke fun at some of the worst meetings we'd ever had the misfortune to attend. We offered humorous suggestions on how to improve a bad situation—all the boring meetings you have to facilitate *and* attend.

But you weren't *listening*.

You went right on having your boring meetings, inviting even more attendees and putting them into a coma with your pointless PowerPoint slides.

*What choice did Jon have?*

You've forced him to create a bigger, badder, louder alarm clock to wake you up to all the time, energy, creativity, and money you're wasting by meeting in boring and banal ways.

Consider this revised and updated version of *Boring Meetings Suck* a paginated intervention—a tough-love text to help you help yourself. Jon has added chapters about using technology to reduce the number of meetings, identifying meeting types, and helping you to decide whether a meeting is even necessary in the first place. (That's right. Nobody said you *had* to hold meetings at all!)

But take it slow.

The information in this book flies in the face of how the corporate world has trained you. At first, use the *Boring Meetings Sucks* SRDs (Suckification Reduction Devices) to lower the suck level of your meetings. Once you're comfortable doing that, then strive to eliminate that sucking sound altogether.

I suggest you give this book to your boss (personally or anonymously), hand it to anyone in charge of a committee, or conveniently leave it in plain sight on the conference room table. Most important, keep your own copy close by and follow the advice within. You'll see how it can benefit meeting *attendees* just as much as meeting *facilitators*! Yes, even as an attendee, you can use these tips to suggest meeting alternatives when possible and speed up the meetings you can't avoid altogether.

So then what's that loud sucking sound?

Must be someone else's meeting...

**—Don The Idea Guy Snyder**

[www.dontheideaguy.com](http://www.dontheideaguy.com)

# ***Agenda Item 1***

## ***Boring Meetings Suck...so Why Do We Have 'Em?***

Why do so many meetings have to suck...

So badly?

So consistently?

How many millions upon millions of people are wondering every day: *Why* am I stuck in this meeting? I have far better things to do than listen to people put in their two cents several times over. And how on earth do I get out of here?

They're also asking—

- Why was I even invited?
- Why is this presenter *reading* PowerPoint slides? Couldn't this person have just mailed the presentation to everyone and skipped the meeting?
- Why is this meeting going a full hour even though we finished the agenda in 35 minutes?
- Why is this conference call being constantly interrupted with the question, "Who just joined?"
- Why is this meeting wasting thousands of dollars of human capital by endlessly talking about problems but never solving them?
- Why is the boss holding a meeting to get our input, but all the while wearing the intended solution on his or her sleeve?
- Why is the dreaded annual meeting a time we're told what we're doing wrong and preached to all

day? Don't they ever want to hear from us?

Ever felt like this? *Then you're in the right spot!*

Where did we, as humans, go wrong? I think it goes all the way back to Adam meeting Eve. The objective of their meeting—to stay away from that fruit—was never clearly identified as an action item. And not much has changed since then.

In September 2010, a front-page story in *USA Today* reported that 49 percent of all office meetings are found to be “wasted time.”<sup>1</sup> Given that, let me be perfectly clear: **Meetings aren't the problem. The people running them are!**

Humankind has landed on the moon, embraced new technologies at breakneck speed, and advanced in so many ways, but we are still plagued with this billion-dollar problem of running meetings poorly! No one has stood up to aggressively battle this plague! Something needs to change in a way that will be received, understood, and implemented by the everyday worker.

It's going to take a revolution, folks! Workers of the world, unite!

*Boring Meetings Suck* introduces a radical new approach and premise, and it dares to admit what other books avoid—that every attendee has a right and responsibility to make every meeting productive for all involved. Only when empowered attendees diplomatically speak up and get meetings on track will everyone benefit, instead of suffering in silence as an ineffective facilitator loses control.

What I'm calling for is for you—and everyone you meet with—to become part of the Bore No More! movement, and this book, *Boring Meetings Suck*, is the backbone of that movement.

I'm not encouraging outright mutiny here, and I definitely don't want you to get fired for walking out of all



your meetings. I simply want to help make your day more productive. Don't let yet another era pass full of finger-pointing, faultfinding, and miserable meetings. Personally and financially, we simply cannot afford to do so a moment longer.

Fortunately, advanced guidance is here in the Agenda Items on these pages you have in your hands—a book that will revolutionize the new millennium.

## **Hey, Not *All* Meetings Suck**

Please don't get the idea that, in this book, I'm only ranting about poorly run meetings. If I did that, I'd just be another victim blaming everyone and their mother for all the time wasted in meetings.

Let me set something straight right now.

I'm officially and boldly stating this: Meetings can be *awesome*. After all, face-to-face meetings are the lifeblood of thriving organizations. By definition, meetings are the act of people coming together to achieve a common goal through communication and interaction. That “achieving a common goal” is the key to this whole thing. And when meetings are engaging, they accomplish amazing things. They:

- Deliver information that allows team members to excel.
- Foster a spirit of creativity.
- Supply much-needed motivation and incentive.
- Build unity, cohesion, and commitment to a mission.

In contrast, it's those poorly planned, poorly facilitated meetings with poor participation that suck the life out of business, government, and non-profit organizations.

A *great* meeting can provide *great* value, especially when *great* value has been designed into it. Many professional meeting and event planners, executives, cubicle workers, and others have skillful ideas of what to do: They prepare well, engage others, get issues finalized, and end a meeting when it's time for it to end. Their well-run meetings add value to everyone's professional and personal growth as well as to the organization's bottom line.

If you're one of these accomplished meeting planners or facilitators, I commend you and offer you even more amazing advice. I promise you'll find this book *indispensable* in achieving your desired outcomes.

## **Nothing More Boring Than a Boring Book about Boring Meetings**

Yes, this is a book about meetings, but I solemnly promise it's not another boring meeting book. The only thing worse than a boring meeting is a boring book about meetings! Trust me, I know. This is a fun, doable-instead-of-daunting read, so even the busiest of road warriors can dig in and derive value in a few minutes.

In this book, *Boring Meetings Suck*, I want to do more than share my secrets. I want to empower you to take responsibility and make any meeting you attend better, even if it looks hopeless. If it's *truly* hopeless, I'll also let you in on my years of research about how to get out of a meeting without getting fired—an art form in itself.

To speed things along, I've introduced what we at Bore No More! headquarters have christened **Suckification Reduction Devices**—SRDs, for short. They're easy-to-read and even-easier-to-implement ideas that you'll

appreciate having when you find yourself stuck in another boring meeting.

You'll see SRDs for facilitators, attendees, presenters and organizers noted at the end of each Agenda Item. They're true gems that can catapult you from a mere participant to a “Get More Out of Meetings, or Get Out of More Meetings” master.

## **What's in It for You?**

I'm on a mission to get everyone on the Bore No More! bandwagon. I want good meetings to be great; I want unnecessary meetings to stop; and when they're not productive, I want to show you how to fix them or get out of them gracefully.

This book is for you if:

- You're a meetings expert looking to improve your already stellar meeting performance and enhance client meetings with new ideas and methods.
- Your organization needs an easy reference blueprint for more effective meetings.
- You and your team want to stop wasting time with poorly planned and administered meetings.
- You're willing to step up and take responsibility for every meeting you're in, even if you're not hosting it.
- You're among the millions upon millions who see that boring meetings suck the energy, time, creativity, and even profit out of our organizations—and want to change that.

When you take the Agenda Items to heart, you'll learn:

- How to excuse yourself from a meeting without losing your job.

- Three polite, proactive ways to motivate people to “wrap it up.”
- Why you and others should turn your phones *on* in meetings.
- Quips and tips to make your presentation powerful, not pointless.
- Essential elements for planning large meetings or conferences.
- New techniques that will enable you to run “Get In, Get It Done, and Get Out” meetings.
- How to be the hero of your meetings, have people show up on time, participate fully, and applaud your efforts as they return to their desks with extra time in their pockets.

The more people who understand and accept these concepts, the better, so everyone can reap the benefits of using them in meetings.

## **How Do You Use This Book? Jump in and Read the Agenda Item You Need**

Frankly, beyond the first Agenda Item, it doesn't matter where you start reading this book. That's right. Read it completely randomly or out of order if you like. Look at the contents headings. If a particular Agenda Item piques your interest, go for it. Grab what you want when you can use it most.

You'll find *Boring Meetings Suck* to be an essential book that can be referenced at a moment's notice whenever the need strikes. In most cases, the SRDs in each Agenda Item can be used right away, no long deliberation

needed. Read an item, pick your favorite SRD, and apply it. Then repeat as needed.

## **Are You Ready to Make Meetings Rock?**

Join other large and small organizations that have made the Bore No More! philosophy their guide. And bring the movement into your office with help from our Bore No More! staff at [www.BoreNoMore.com](http://www.BoreNoMore.com).

As you read *Boring Meetings Suck*, you'll laugh and maybe even cry. My hope is that you'll look at yourself and realize what others have whispered behind closed doors: "this meetings sucks!" And then you'll do something about it.

If you're sick and tired of being sick and tired of boring meetings, heed this advice. Either apply the ideas in this book along with your team and organization and get on with your life, or risk another hundred-plus years of humankind making every kind of technological improvement imaginable yet forgoing one of our greatest strengths—our ability to make meetings *rock* instead of *suck*.

Are you ready?

**1.** "StrategyOne Labor Day Public Opinion Survey on the American Worker" on the PR newswire on September 3, 2010.



## ***Agenda Item 2***

### ***Better Meetings and Conventions through Technology...but Please Proceed with Caution***

“I would appreciate it, if you would take a moment to please turn off your phones or leave them in the box by the door.”

In our technology-laden world, there's basically one response to that request, “Um, you can kiss my...”

You want to start your meeting with a twist that will raise some eyebrows? Try this one.

“Hey, everyone, please make sure your phones are out and on.”

You don't seriously expect people to go a fraction of a minute without their safety blanket in the form of a phone, do you? Do you really expect them to make continual eye contact with you?

Heck no. Expect them to be interacting in your meeting and to have two digital dialogues going at the same time. So why not concede the point?

In reality, if your meeting is productive and engaging, you won't have random texting that isn't directly related to the function of the meeting. If your meeting is boring, on the other hand, then good luck with that and don't let the door hit you on the way out.

The fascination of instantaneous communication with anyone in the world at any time mixed with the sheer

separation anxiety most of us feel when that mobile device is not securely on our hip or in our pocket, is no fault but our own. We've been bred to read e-mail anywhere we are, thanks to our BlackBerrys, and texting is not just a language for teenagers anymore. From the most basic forms of technology in these examples to the most sophisticated and new applications to “enhance our productivity,” we are forever either troubled or blessed with technology in our meetings. It all depends on the way you look at it. Just a few years ago I had a different approach. I thought text messaging was a glorified way of passing notes in class like we did in third grade.

Today, texting and other techniques that are readily available in the palms of our hands open the realm of instant information sharing, gathering, and evaluating on a grand scale and with a global reach. This can take idea-generation sessions to new heights, for example. You can poll opinions and solutions, just to mention two of the myriad things current technology can do.

**Technology is grand stuff. But here's the problem. The meeting organizer or facilitator allows technology to become the meeting instead of enhance it.**

You know the phenomenon well. In our personal lives, we are bombarded with all the new developments and cool things that are supposed to make life better, more productive, and efficient. But too often, all the gadgets and widgets we use force us to cram more and more into an already overcrowded day. We've come to spend more time looking at a digital screen and less time interacting with other humans.

The fact is that it still comes down to us. We make our lives what they are. We make the decisions to use these gadgets to our benefit or simply just to look cool and keep up. Similarly, if we are cramming technology into

our general office meetings because it seems like the right thing to do, or if we are trying to replace our ineffectiveness by hiding behind digital distractions, then we need to take a hard look at why we are using them.

If you put together a videoconference with your team in Houston and feel that just because you are “together” as a team you can skip the formalities of a proper agenda and real objectives, then you're sadly mistaken. I see this happen on a regular basis with online and Web-based meetings in which the hosts think the technology of the meeting platform will do the work for them. Result—one sucky meeting! (See Agenda Item Agenda Item 6, “Online or Virtual Meetings Suck.”)

Corbin Ball of Corbin Ball Associates, an expert in meeting technologies with more than 20 years of experience, who has been named as one of the “25 Most Influential People in the Meetings Industry” by *MeetingNews Magazine* for four years running, shares with me his position:

Meeting professionals grapple like everyone else in this ever-changing environment of new advances and uses of technology. It allows us to bring in speakers who may be in other locations and can engage the audience with real-time polling and event feedback. The key is definitely to provide potential to enhance the meeting in a way in which everyone can partake, but not losing sight of the meeting design or outcomes in place of cool technology.

One technology that I, like many others, have made a personal habit of using, in a small way, has been social media. In so many cases, Facebook or Twitter contains fluff: random updates or points that most people couldn't possibly care about. But what if we apply this core technology to a meeting environment? How can we use it to generate new ideas or as a tool to foster creativity? In

fact, that's what I did at various times while creating this book. In several chapters, I share actual feedback from various postings on social media sites. I have done it for this chapter, too, by posing this question on Facebook: "What technology in a meeting can you *not* live without?"

I was totally surprised by the answers:

"A ballpoint pen"

"Paper"

"Fresh whiteboard and new markers"

"Digital camera"

"The mute button"

"Giant sticky note pads"

"Good PA system"

I didn't get it at first. Those weren't the answers I was looking for. "No," I Facebooked back, "I said *technology!*"

I wanted another opinion, so I spoke with Wendy Nicodemus, the general manager of Quest Conference and Business Centers, a state-of-the-art meeting and special event facility in Columbus, Ohio. It's an exceptional space with a high-service oriented team, and all the cool technology toys you'd ever want to try.

I asked her "What are people *really* using?"

"Most are still in the PowerPoint and projector mode" Wendy explains. "And we still need to help them understand the importance of a second screen with larger audiences."

I was disappointed. I had hoped to hear that my social respondents and Wendy's clients were using the newest gadgets and high-definition video telepresence units, projectors the size of phones, and Bluetooth pens that digitally transcribe right to your laptop. But they weren't. I realized the honest truth; most people are not using it.

Is this normal? Good? Bad?