



Bad meetings

Lesson code: 12BR-N6CB-4MBE

Upper-intermediate (B2-C1)

 American English

1 Warm-up

How often do you attend meetings in your work? Are they always productive?

2 Idiomatic expressions

What do you think the underlined phrases and idioms mean? In pairs, match them to their correct meaning below:

1. I'm not going to stand for his behavior anymore. I need to fire him.
 2. After his manager refused to pay him his bonus, Joe decided to make a stink.
 3. The meeting we attended was a total train wreck. Every second was a disaster.
 4. The solution to this problem is right at your fingertips. You just need to look at it again.
 5. I'm not looking forward to tomorrow's meeting. I can't wait to get it done with.
- a. a chaotic or disastrous situation
 - b. easily obtained
 - c. finish completely so that you can continue doing other things
 - d. take strong and forceful action to show that you are not satisfied with a situation
 - e. tolerate

3 Before you watch

You are going to watch David Grady talk about how bad, inefficient, and overcrowded meetings negatively affect businesses and employees. What do you think he is going to say?



4 What do you remember?

Answer the questions below in your own words.

1. According to David, what are meeting organizers stealing from us?
2. What is Mindless Accept Syndrome (MAS)?
3. What is the key to success in an organization?
4. What has dramatically changed the way we work?
5. What did David do that proved we have a global problem with meetings?
6. What is the common theme in the comments that were posted online under his video?
7. How does he propose to stop mindlessly accepting meeting invitations?

5 Words in the video

Look at the transcript of the talk. Find a word or phrase which means ...

1. a small partitioned area of an office containing a desk (*noun, P1*) _____
2. a disease that spreads rapidly and widely among the population in an area (*noun, P3*) _____
3. spreading widely throughout an area or a group of people (*adjective, P4*) _____
4. omit (*verb, P5*) _____
5. not certain (*adjective, P7*) _____

6 Phrasal verbs

Read the transcript of the talk and complete the definitions below with the infinitive forms of the underlined phrasal verbs.

1. _____ : to perform something as if you are in a play or film
2. _____ : to continue
3. _____ : to start doing something suddenly and energetically, often without stopping to think
4. _____ : to suddenly appear
5. _____ : to be published online
6. _____ : to distribute (something)
7. _____ : to be present in every part of something
8. _____ : to become familiar with somewhere new

Now give your own example sentence for each phrasal verb.



7 Collocations

Match the adjectives and nouns to form collocations from the talk.

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| 1. an unproductive | a. belief |
| 2. a global | b. decision |
| 3. an involuntary | c. epidemic |
| 4. a fundamental | d. meeting |
| 5. a thoughtful | e. reflex |

Now make a sentence about the topic of the talk for each phrase.

8 Talking point

Discuss any of the questions below.

1. What do you think of David's talk? Do you share his opinions?
2. Do you think his proposal would work in your company?
3. What kind of issues should/shouldn't be discussed at meetings?



3 Before you watch

- 0:42** Picture this: It's Monday morning, you're at the office, you're settling in for the day at work, and this guy that you sort of recognize from down the hall, walks right into your cubicle and he steals your chair. Doesn't say a word just rolls away with it. Doesn't give you any information about why he took your chair out of all the other chairs that are out there. Doesn't acknowledge the fact that you might need your chair to get some work done today. You wouldn't stand for it. You'd make a stink. You'd follow that guy back to his cubicle and you'd say, "Why my chair?"
- 1:19** Okay, so now it's Tuesday morning and you're at the office, and a meeting invitation pops up in your calendar. (Laughter) And it's from this woman who you kind of know from down the hall, and the subject line references some project that you heard a little bit about. But there's no agenda. There's no information about why you were invited to the meeting. And yet you accept the meeting invitation, and you go. And when this highly unproductive session is over, you go back to your desk, and you stand at your desk and you say, "Boy, I wish I had those two hours back, like I wish I had my chair back." (Laughter)
- 2:01** Every day, we allow our coworkers, who are otherwise very, very nice people, to steal from us. And I'm talking about something far more valuable than office furniture. I'm talking about time. Your time. In fact, I believe that we are in the middle of a global epidemic of a terrible new illness known as MAS: Mindless Accept Syndrome. (Laughter) The primary symptom of Mindless Accept Syndrome is just accepting a meeting invitation the minute it pops up in your calendar. (Laughter) It's an involuntary reflex -- ding, click, bing -- it's in your calendar, "Gotta go, I'm already late for a meeting." (Laughter)
- 2:32** Meetings are important, right? And collaboration is key to the success of any enterprise. And a well-run meeting can yield really positive, actionable results. But between globalization and pervasive information technology, the way that we work has really changed dramatically over the last few years. And we're miserable. (Laughter) And we're miserable not because the other guy can't run a good meeting, it's because of MAS, our Mindless Accept Syndrome, which is a self-inflicted wound.
- 3:52** Actually, I have evidence to prove that MAS is a global epidemic. Let me tell you why. A couple of years ago, I put a video on Youtube, and in the video, I acted out every terrible conference call you've ever been on. It goes on for about five minutes, and it has all the things that we hate about really bad meetings. There's the moderator who has no idea how to run the meeting. There are the participants who have no idea why they're there. The whole thing kind of collapses into this collaborative train wreck. And everybody leaves very angry. It's kind of funny. (Laughter) Let's take a quick look. (Video) Our goal today is to come to an agreement on a very important proposal. As a group, we need to decide if -- bloop bloop -- Hi, who just joined? Hi, it's Joe. I'm working from home today. (Laughter) Hi, Joe. Thanks for joining us today, great. I was just saying, we have a lot of people on the call we'd like to get through, so let's skip the roll call and I'm gonna dive right in. Our goal today is to come to an agreement on a very important proposal. As a group, we need to decide if -- bloop bloop (Laughter) -- Hi, who just joined? No? I thought I heard a beep. (Laughter)
- 5:01** Sound familiar? Yeah, it sounds familiar to me, too. A couple of weeks after I put that online, 500,000 people in dozens of countries, I mean dozens of countries, watched this video. And three years later, it's still getting thousands of views every month. It's close to about a million right now. And in fact, some of the biggest companies in the world, companies that you've heard of but I won't name, have asked for my permission to use this video in their new-hire training to teach their new employees how not to run a meeting at their company. And if the numbers -- there are a million views and it's being used by all these companies -- aren't enough proof that we have a global problem with meetings, there are the many, many thousands of comments posted online after the video went up. Thousands of people wrote things like, "OMG, that was my day today!" "That was my day every day!" "This is my life." One guy wrote, "It's funny because it's true. Eerily, sadly, depressingly true. It made me laugh until I cried. And cried. And I cried some more." (Laughter) This poor guy said, "My daily life until retirement or death, sigh." These are real quotes and it's real sad.



5:32 A common theme running through all of these comments online is this fundamental belief that we are powerless to do anything other than go to meetings and suffer through these poorly run meetings and live to meet another day. But the truth is, we're not powerless at all. In fact, the cure for MAS is right here in our hands. It's right at our fingertips, literally. It's something that I call No MAS! (Laughter) Which, if I remember my high school Spanish, means something like, "Enough already, make it stop!" Here's how No MAS works. It's very simple. First of all, the next time you get a meeting invitation that doesn't have a lot of information in it at all, click the tentative button! It's okay, you're allowed, that's why it's there. It's right next to the accept button. Or the maybe button, or whatever button is there for you not to accept immediately. Then, get in touch with the person who asked you to the meeting. Tell them you're very excited to support their work, ask them what the goal of the meeting is, and tell them you're interested in learning how you can help them achieve their goal. And if we do this often enough, and we do it respectfully, people might start to be a little bit more thoughtful about the way they put together meeting invitations. And you can make more thoughtful decisions about accepting it. People might actually start sending out agendas. Imagine! Or they might not have a conference call with 12 people to talk about a status when they could just do a quick email and get it done with. People just might start to change their behavior because you changed yours. And they just might bring your chair back, too. (Laughter) No MAS! Thank you. (Applause).



2 Idiomatic expressions

1. e 2. d 3. a 4. b 5. c

3 Before you watch

Brainstorm ideas from the students and then play the whole video.

4 What do you remember?

Play the video again if necessary. Pause where appropriate to allow students to write down the answers.

1. our time
2. accepting a meeting invitation the minute it pops up in your calendar
3. collaboration
4. globalization and information technology
5. He made a video of a bad meeting.
6. the fact that we are powerless to do anything but go to meetings
7. Click the tentative button and then get in touch with the person who asked you to the meeting.

5 Words in the video

Hand out a copy of the transcript to the students.

1. cubicle 2. epidemic 3. pervasive
4. skip 5. tentative

6 Phrasal verbs

1. act out 2. go on 3. dive in 4. pop up
5. go up 6. send out 7. run through 8. settle in

7 Collocations

1. d
2. c
3. e
4. a
5. b

