

About Quiet Days

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The question I asked of other organizations:

- My organization is dying from a death-by-zoom. I spend 6+ hours on zoom now and the only time I can execute is evenings and weekends. I know as a manager I have it worse than some, but the sentiment is ubiquitous.

We experimented with a org-wide, no-meetings-allowed, quiet day: no slack, no zoom, pretend it's a weekend day before you ask someone for help. Most people enjoyed it and got a lot done. The debate started when we began discussing whether we should do this regularly. Every week or every 2 weeks. **Does your organization have a coordinated no-meetings day? What do you do, and how's it going?**

Most common configuration was No Meetings Fridays (1 of 2)

- We recently started “no meeting Fridays”. Most people are abiding by it. I put a repeating block in my calendar for Fridays that says “No Meetings” as a reminder.
- Our company is doing no meeting Fridays for everyone. I think that's largely working out well for ICs. Not sure about managers. **We still collaborate and have quick discussions or pair program.** But no recurring or scheduled meetings on Fridays.
- We have no meeting Fridays, and 'Perch time' (everything's bird related..., which is 2 hours a day blocked off, we also start meetings at 5mins past the hour/half hour (so like the google speedy meeting options), and really push for agendas for everything and async docs as much as possible before we get into meetings.
- My company does something called Flex Fridays every week which among other things is a no meeting day, including no interviews. Described in this blog post (which is a bit outdated at this point) <https://www.cockroachlabs.com/blog/can-a-4-day-work-week-work/>

Most common configuration was No Meetings Fridays (2 of 2)

- For us, it's not entire org-wide (intentionally) but my group has tried for meeting-free Fridays since before I joined a year and a half ago. (I say not intentionally, because most of the org is in Israel and works a Sunday-Thursday week, so Friday is their weekend anyhow. My group is all non-Israel-based.) It's weekly, **We're encouraged to turn off notifications of Slack for the day and the non-leads/managers are given time for their own projects.** In practice, the developers sometimes get to do their own projects and others have to continue critical-path things (though we're now trying to make sure they get the time on other days when they do have to not take the Friday time). As leads/managers, we're seeing some creep of meetings into Friday as the rest of the days fill up, but in general it's working pretty well - that's the day I get most of my own tasks completed. I highly recommend the idea.

Other configurations

- **Once a month:** Chipping in, we tried second Wednesday of every month to be no meeting day. While productive and overall positive sentiment, the common concerns were around people getting swamped with the meetings on a day before or after. Not sure if anyone else faced that.
- **Once a quarter:** My org has a few no-meetings weeks each year, and in general a low meeting load. I don't think no-meetings days (or timeslots) are an effective solution if people are drowning; **you need to start getting rid of meetings.**

Twice-per-week Maker Days for ICs only

- We have twice-per-week Maker Days for all ICs in engineering, product, and design. We do them on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We agreed that there are no meetings for ICs except for daily stand-ups and candidate interviews. **Our team loves these days. It consistently comes up in our employee engagement surveys as one of the things they love the most about our working environment.** Leaders have to hold themselves accountable to actually doing it. ICs have to be empowered to speak up if meetings are happening on their Maker Days. Although Maker Days don't apply to me, they have fundamentally shifted how I manage my week. Since I don't have 1:1s with my team on those days, I instead can focus those days on strategic work with my fellow leaders, or take some heads-down time to get something done myself. **M/W are my days to focus on my team and their culture. Tu/Th are my days to focus on my company and our strategy.**

A warning

- My org has tried to do it numerous times. Unfortunately it need seems to hold. Because everything eventually comes through as “urgent” or “critical” etc (either due to lack of planning or just not caring). I support it for my teams and will go to meetings myself, but it definitely caused everything else to get compressed too.

Other options

- I highly recommend **slicing the calendar the other direction: No meetings from 2-4pm, say.** If you have timezone spread involved, this requires more coordination.
- “I’m a fan of taking some phone calls vs zoom when possible and **walking outside during that time.** I know it doesn’t solve the no meeting time question, but def helps fight zoom fatigue”

Feedback from Science Pipelines

- I got a lot done.
- I can't really get any work done if I can't discuss it (Slack, Jira, GitHub).
- Be very clear with expectations regarding whether this is a day off vs. focus work time - these are NOT the same thing and having mixed expectations only furthers inequities.
- My issue isn't direct messages on Slack, but having to keep an eye on the public channels as decisions get made.

Recommendation

- **Declare Friday a maker-day.** No regular weekly meetings. Encourage people to take turn off notifications. OK to sending direct messages via Jira, Slack, github are fine but keep expectations realistic that people will respond before Monday.