

# THE HAMSTER REVOLUTION

*for Meetings*

How to Meet Less and Get More Done



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Foreword by Ken Blanchard

An Excerpt From

***The Hamster Revolution for Meetings:  
How to Meet Less and Get More Done***

by Mike Song, Vicki Halsey, and Tim Burress  
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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# Foreword

## Ken Blanchard

### **Forty-three percent.**

That's the amount of time professionals say they waste during meetings. It's a stunning number when you consider that meetings consume a huge chunk of every business day.

Making the most of meeting time may be the greatest opportunity we have to get more done, be happier in our jobs, and free up more time. And given the challenges our world faces right now, meetings that identify and solve real problems would go a long way toward making things better. Yet ever since people began gathering together to get work done, the world has been plagued by meetings without clear agendas, meetings that stray off course, meetings with incomplete action items, and meetings without accountability and follow-through.

*The Hamster Revolution for Meetings* excites me because the authors not only provide sound advice on how to manage traditional, face-to-face meetings, they also show how much easier meetings can be with the help of technology: e-calendars, virtual meeting tools, PDAs, and more. Plus, it's a fun story that gets to the point. You can read it cover-to-cover during a 90-minute plane ride.

If you're like the average professional, you spend more than a quarter of your day in meetings. Assuming you want to be a great leader or team player, don't you think it's a good idea to have a strategy for making the most of every meeting you attend? There's no question that this book will save you time—but it also just might take you, your company, and our world to a higher level.

—Ken Blanchard,  
coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*<sup>®</sup>  
and *Leading at a Higher Level*

# 1

## **STUCK!**

We were stuck.

Kim, our flight attendant, had just informed us that a violent thunderstorm was rapidly rolling in.

“If we get seated quickly, we’ll be able to take off a few minutes early and miss the bad weather,” she said.

Unfortunately, one final passenger was arriving at the last possible minute, spoiling the plan. Everyone was grumbling and straining to see who it was.

“Uh, welcome aboard!” said Kim, sounding confused. She was talking to someone, but from our vantage point, no one appeared to be there.

*What was going on?*

Kim turned to watch the invisible passenger trudge down the aisle. At the front of the plane, heads turned and people gasped.

“Did you see that?”

“Oh my!”

Straining to see, I leaned into the aisle to get a better look. Suddenly I was face-to-face with an attractive yet extremely frazzled female hamster. She was no more than two feet tall and wore a dark blue business suit.

My fellow passengers were stunned. The plane fell silent.

“Hi, I’m Iris,” she gasped. “I just ran all the way through the airport.”

A shocked-looking businessman across the aisle said, “You’re a...a...”

“Late, I know,” said Iris apologetically as she motioned to the empty seat next to me. “That’s mine.”

After stowing her computer case, she hopped into her seat and buckled in.

Iris seemed to sense the stares of her fellow passengers.

“Sorry everyone, I was in a meeting that ran way over,” she announced tersely. “And my twins, it’s their birthday tomorrow and I had to make this flight.”

Kim reviewed the safety instructions as our plane backed slowly away from the gate.

Glancing over at Iris, I said, “Meetings can suck the life out of you.”

“Tell me about it,” she replied. “This one was *hideous*.”

“How so?”

“It was a presentation to some of our top execs for a major productivity initiative—the most important thing I’ve ever worked on.”

“So what went wrong?” I asked.

“Everything,” groaned Iris. “It started late and veered into total chaos. David, my assistant, couldn’t get the LCD projector working and no one wanted to follow the agenda.”

She looked up, shut her eyes, and grimaced as if she was replaying every painful minute in her mind.

“This was a productivity project?”

“Operation Elevation,” said Iris sarcastically as she glanced out the window. “We’re transitioning 500 colleagues from our corporate headquarters to home offices in order to eliminate commute time and building costs.”

“I’ve heard about this,” I said thoughtfully. “You’re improving work/life balance, boosting productivity, *and* helping the environment. Don’t they call it home-sourcing?”

Iris gave a glum nod. “The benefits are endless. If we do it right, we save over \$10 million a year. If we do it wrong—and our people can’t adapt—we lose millions!”

“Feeling a bit of pressure?” I asked.

“A *ton* of pressure,” corrected Iris. “My stomach’s been in knots for weeks.”

“And today’s meeting was critical?”

“Yes,” said Iris. “It was my first meeting with the top brass. I was so excited when the CEO picked me to lead the team.”

She let out a heavy sigh.

“Now it feels like Operation Quicksand! It was supposed to take my career to the next level—not bury it. If our next meeting is anything like this one, I’m pretty sure they’ll replace me.”



For a moment Iris seemed lost in her thoughts as she stared out the window. Storm clouds were rolling in from the west.

“What exactly do you do, Iris?” I asked.

“National sales manager at Spex Media,” she replied. “We design and deliver large multimedia events for product launches.”

Iris turned toward me with a slightly suspicious look. “You sure ask a lot of questions. What do *you* do for a living?”

“Sorry for prying. I’m a productivity coach—I help busy people get more done.”

Iris looked skeptical. “How?”

“For example, I help them *get control* of meetings.”

“Hah!” said Iris, dismissing the idea with a wave of her paw. “We tried that. We had a big meeting initiative last year. All our managers went off-site for a two-day training session.” She gestured thumbs down. “None of it stuck.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure. Perhaps there was too much information. Maybe we didn’t focus enough on what the facilitator was saying.

“We made all these big plans. But when we got back to the office there were mountains of email and overdue projects. The whole thing wasn’t very...”

“Practical?” I suggested.

“Yup,” said Iris. “And it didn’t mesh with the way we work. Spex meetings have *changed* in the past few years.”

“How?”

“They’re less formal and more virtual,” said Iris. “We do lots of teleconferences, and most of the stuff we learned didn’t apply to virtual meetings. Also, our leaders didn’t have time to create elaborate agendas or establish ground rules at every meeting.”

“Did it help you reduce unnecessary time spent in meetings?”

Iris laughed. “No way. We’re meeting more than ever and getting less and less done.”

She closed her eyes and put her head in her paws. “It’s hopeless. Operation Elevation is a mess and I’m doomed to run from one chaotic, dead-end meeting to another like a, a...”

She paused and gave me an exasperated look.

“Hamster on a wheel?” I offered.

“That’s it!” cried Iris, bolting up in her seat. “It’s like I’m running in place and never getting anything accomplished. And when I’m in a meeting, I often feel like I’m trapped in a, a...”

“Hamster cage?”

“Yes!” she exclaimed. She lowered her voice and whispered, “I’m sick of feeling like a hamster *all* the time.”

It occurred to me that Iris had no idea she had actually morphed into a hamster. Perhaps the transformation had been so gradual she hadn’t noticed.

The plane hesitated on the runway.

The pilot announced, “We’re going to be delayed a bit longer since we didn’t get that early start. It looks like the storm may pass to the north, but traffic control is asking us to wait a few more minutes.”

Several passengers groaned and some even glared at Iris. She slumped in her seat.

“Look, Iris,” I said. “Since we’re going to be sitting here for a while, maybe I can help you with your meeting challenge.”

Iris looked around as if she was searching for another place to sit.

“I appreciate it—but as I said, we’re hopeless.”

She glanced out the rain-streaked window and sighed. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“My career—my life,” she replied. “I always pictured this amazing job where people worked together and achieved a ton each day.”

“What did you think your meetings would be like?” I asked.

Her whiskers twitched as she considered. “For some reason I thought that each meeting would have a clear purpose, structure, and a set of follow-up actions that people would complete before the next meeting. I guess I saw them as places where people energized each other and did their best thinking. You know—got fired up and charged forward with renewed focus. I pictured myself coming home to my husband and the twins feeling relaxed and satisfied that I had contributed and accomplished a lot.”

Shaking her head sadly, Iris added, “I never thought I’d spend my days running from one lousy meeting to the next, feeling like a stressed-out hamster!”

## 2

# LIFTOFF

Iris turned to me. “I hope I didn’t offend you...by saying that I didn’t need help with meetings.”

“Oh no,” I replied. “I understand completely.”

She fidgeted in her seat for a moment.

“I’ve noticed lately—there’s a lot more *leg room* on these flights.”

“There sure is,” I agreed, smiling gently. Iris was quiet for a moment.

Suddenly she asked, “How exactly do you help people with meetings?”

I smiled again. “At first, you may think my approach is a bit odd.”

“No I won’t,” said Iris emphatically. “I promise.”

“Okay,” I said. “If you feel like a hamster on a wheel—running harder and faster but getting nowhere—that’s a serious problem. You need more than just a few tips and tricks to reclaim your life.”

“Sounds reasonable,” encouraged Iris.

“We need a whole new way to meet, something revolutionary. And the good news is that this revolution has already begun. It’s taking off around the world and anyone can join.”

“Does this movement have a name?” she asked, raising her eyebrows.

“The Hamster Revolution for Meetings.”

I heard some snickers from behind us. Apparently, other passengers were eavesdropping.

“Ridiculous name,” said one with a smirk.

“But keep talking, we’re drowning in meetings too!” grinned another.

Iris continued. “What’s involved with,” she formed quotation marks with her paws, “*joining*?”

“For starters, you make a commitment to be responsible for the value of meetings you both run *and* attend. Then you master a new set of meeting tools and share them with other hamsters.”

“So it’s a productivity cult for rodents,” said Iris with a wicked grin.

“People join because they’re sick and tired of feeling trapped in the meeting cage,” I explained. “It’s an escape plan that helps you reclaim your life and get more done.”

Her grin disappeared and she looked wistful. “A day full of useless meetings can really be exhausting. And then I have to stay late to catch up on assignments and email. That’s why my family hates me these days.”

“So meetings are messing up things at home?”

“Uh huh,” said Iris resignedly. “How is your approach different from the training we had last year?”

“There are huge differences,” I said. “Instead of teaching you everything under the sun, we focus on your *five biggest meeting pain points*—the ones that are causing 80 percent of the problems.”

She seemed to approve of this approach. “So I don’t have to spend two whole days becoming a meeting goddess?”

I shook my head and continued, “And this revolution isn’t just for leaders. As I said, everyone must contribute to the effectiveness of meetings.”

Iris thought for a moment. “That makes sense. These days everyone on our team both schedules and attends meetings—it’s not just a leader thing.”

“Exactly,” I said. “And this revolution is designed for the information age. It’s all about the way information flows through your meetings and the technology we use to plan, schedule, and follow up. That’s why they call me an *info coach* rather than a meeting coach.”

Just then the captain came on. “There’s an opening in the storm, folks, and we’re finally cleared for liftoff.” Our jet began to move down the runway, slowly gathering momentum.

“So you think you can help me?”

“I know I can,” I said confidently.

“And this hamster thing—which frankly sounds too good to be true—will save me time?” she asked, raising her voice over

the revving jet engines. We were rocketing forward, gathering momentum.

“Fifteen days a year!” I said loudly. “And we’ll get Operation Elevation *and* your life back on track.”

Iris thought for a moment as the jet neared liftoff speed.

“Do I have to sign anything?” she asked with a cautious smile.

“No,” I laughed, “but you do have to commit to making every meeting better than the last.”

“I guess I could do that,” she said in a tone that still conveyed some doubt. Then she brightened. “Okay, Coach, I’ll join!”

She raised a tiny fist into the air and cried, “Go hamsters!”

There was a smattering of applause and laughter from our fellow passengers as the big jet rose off the runway, powering its way into the sky. A moment later we broke through the clouds and suddenly the cabin was filled with sunlight.

We were finally on our way.

# 3

## THE BIG FIVE

After the jet reached cruising altitude, Iris pulled a small bag of celery sticks from her computer case.

“Been craving veggies lately,” she said between munches. “So what are the five big meeting *pain points* you’ve been yammering about?”

“Why don’t you tell me?” I replied. “What bothers you most about meetings at Spex?”

Iris thought for a moment and said, “Sheer volume. We meet too much.”

“What else?”

“Our meetings always start and end late—we jokingly call that ‘Spex Time.’ We never stay on track, agendas are rare, and presentations run way too long.”



Her whiskers twitched as she paused to think. “Oh yes, and action items *vaporize* the moment people leave.”

“Does this happen in both live and virtual meetings?” I asked.

Iris rolled her eyes. “Don’t get me started on virtual meetings! Most of them are boring as mud. I swear that half of my team is doing email during our weekly sales managers’ teleconference—especially Alex.”

“Alex?” I asked.

“He’s one of our best regional sales managers. But he never says a word in meetings, and if I call on him, he always sounds startled. He’s probably surfing the web or downloading music.”

Iris leaned toward me and whispered, “Personally, I’m starting to wonder if he really exists.”

“Okay,” I laughed. “What other concerns do you have about virtual meetings?”

“Tech issues,” she said. “In today’s Operation Elevation meeting, the senior leadership team had trouble logging in to the web conference, so we started 15 minutes late. In other remote meetings—often with our clients—we’ve had computers freeze, noisy cell phones, dropped lines, scheduling problems, you name it.”

“So virtual meetings are a big concern?”

“They could save Spex millions in travel costs and help us go green,” sighed Iris. “Unfortunately, our virtual meetings stink!”

She flashed a desperate, defeated look. “Can you untangle this mess?”

“Sure we can,” I said, reaching into my computer bag. I handed Iris a small bifold card titled *The Hamster Revolution for Meetings Power Tools*. “We start here,” I said, pointing to the first section of the card, “The Hamster Revolution Meeting Plan.”

“Neat,” said Iris, looking carefully at the card. “You’ve outlined most of the challenges I just mentioned and provided a solution for each one.”

The Hamster Revolution Meeting Plan	
Challenge	Solution
1. <b>Meeting Overload</b>	POSE the right questions and cut meeting time by 15%
2. <b>Missing Key Elements</b>	The Meeting Power Draft locks in key success ingredients.
3. <b>Virtual Meeting Chaos</b>	Two checklists make remote meetings riveting <i>and</i> glitch free.
4. <b>Meandering Meetings</b>	The NNNO tool keeps meetings on track—every time.
5. <b>Incomplete Action Items</b>	A Meeting Action Plan (MAP) helps everyone complete action items.

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“We’ve also found that the top five meeting complaints apply to many *different* kinds of meetings, including staff, brainstorming, one-on-one, and client meetings.”

“So addressing these five problems helps almost everyone in almost every meeting situation,” reasoned Iris, taking the card from my hand and leaning back in her seat to study it.

“We’re experiencing all of these challenges,” she said. “But how long does this hamster thing take?”

I pointed at the plan and said, “We can cover the first two items, Meeting Overload and Missing Key Elements, on this short flight.

“If you find our discussion valuable and want to learn more, I’ll attend a few of your virtual meetings and provide feedback and solutions next week—that’s how we’ll tackle Virtual Meeting Chaos.

“Finally, I’d be happy to visit you and your team at Spex headquarters in three weeks. That’s when we’ll cover the last two topics, Meandering Meetings and Incomplete Action Items. Your total time investment will be three hours.”

“Not bad. But what about those 15 days?” asked Iris, with a mischievous grin that said *prove it to me*. “How can you possibly save me that much time?”

I smiled and said, “I thought you’d never ask.”

this material has been excerpted from

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