

LEAN IN



ALL-IN-ONE MEETING GUIDE

# How to Gain Control of Your Time

# Overview

This guide offers time-management activities adapted from best-selling author Laura Vanderkam's [TED Talk](#). They are designed help you achieve your biggest ambitions—without feeling overwhelmed.

## MEETING GOALS

- Understand your goals and break them into manageable steps
- Make a game plan for the next week using your calendar

## PRE-MEETING PREP

- Remind everyone to watch [Laura Vanderkam's TED Talk](#) (if you're not planning to watch it during the meeting)
- Remind everyone to bring a copy of this PDF
- Remind everyone to bring her One Action Update (if you're doing this)



# Meeting Agenda

🕒 Approx. 90 minutes for total meeting (based on a group size of ten members)

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## 1 Check-In

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

*Warm up, catch up, and get going*

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## 2 Education Activities

🕒 Approx. 55 minutes

*Learn from experts and one another*

- **Activity 1: Review key takeaways** 🕒 5 minutes  
Individual/group activity
  - **Activity 2: Define your goals** 🕒 25 minutes  
Individual/group activity
  - **Activity 3: Break your goals into doable steps** 🕒 20 minutes  
Individual/group activity
  - **Activity 4: Put the next steps on your schedule** 🕒 5 minutes  
Individual activity
  - **Activity 5 (for extra credit): Track your time**  
Individual activity  
Do at home over the next week or two
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## 3 One Action

🕒 Approx. 5 minutes

*The little push you need to go for it*

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## 4 Wrap-Up

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

*What's next and a few final words*

# Meeting Guide

## 1 Check-In

*Warm up, catch up, and get going*

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

### Step 1: Icebreaker

👥 Group activity

🕒 5 minutes or less

An icebreaker is a powerful tool to help us become present with one another and ourselves. Use this icebreaker to see how your Circle members feel about the way they manage their time. Read out the statements below and have members raise their hand if they relate to the experience. Avoid the urge to slip into conversation.

- Raise your hand if you've ever struggled to make time for everything
- Raise your hand if you feel like your days are full but the important stuff never gets done
- Raise your hand if you wish you could do other things during downtime—for example, spend less time on your phone or watching TV

### Step 2: Member Updates

👥 Group activity

🕒 1 minute or less per member

Once you're warmed up, go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It's OK not to have one every month!)

If you have a One Action Update, share that with your Circle at the same time. (A One Action is one concrete action you committed to take at your last meeting; the goal of a One Action is to step outside your comfort zone or practice a new skill.)

**For example, a member update might go like this:** "Since our last meeting, I asked my boss for a big assignment and got it. I'm thrilled but a little nervous [personal update]. For my One Action, I asked that coworker I've been struggling with out for lunch. She immediately said yes, and I was surprised by how easily we got along. I can see it helping in the office, and we're going out for lunch again next week—her invite! [One Action Update]."

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## 2 Educational Activities

*These exercises will help you set your priorities and make sure they get done*

🕒 Approx. 55 minutes for all activities

### Activity 1: Review key takeaways

👥 Individual or group activity

🕒 Approx. 5 minutes

In her TED Talk “How to Gain Control of Your Free Time,” Laura Vanderkam explains how to fit in the things that really matter. Read her main insights on your own or as a group:

#### Stop saying you don’t have time for things

When we say, “I don’t have time,” it often means, “It’s not a priority.” Laura says she could tell you she doesn’t have time to dust her blinds, but that wouldn’t be true: “If you offered to pay me \$100,000 to dust my blinds, I would get to it pretty quickly.” So instead of saying you don’t have time, say, “I don’t do x because it’s not a priority.”

#### Treat your priorities as though they’re urgent

If an emergency crops up, you’ll drop everything to make time for it. For example, when a woman’s water heater broke, she found seven hours in her busy week to deal with the disaster. We need to treat our goals like emergencies—as though they’re a water heater flooding our homes—instead of thinking we’re too busy to work on them.

#### Know that you can do amazing things in small time windows

Small moments of time can have great power. You can use your free moments for joy, such as choosing to read something wonderful on the bus to work, or planning in advance to go for a ten-minute walk with the kids when you get home.

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## Activity 2: Define your goals

🕒 Approx. 25 minutes

### STEP 1: WRITE YOUR PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR NEXT YEAR

👤 Individual activity

🕒 10 minutes

- We often look back on our performance but rarely take the time to look ahead to our biggest goals. One way to do that is by writing your own performance review for next year—now.
- Pretend it's the end of next year and you're giving yourself a performance review.
- It's been an absolutely amazing year for you professionally. What three to five things did you do that made it so amazing?
  - For example: "Anna's big research report was invaluable. It highlighted important new trends and captured unexpected media attention."

My performance review:

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## STEP 2: WRITE OUT YOUR GOALS

 Individual activity

 Approx 5–10 minutes

- Use your vision for your performance review to identify three to five goals you can set for the next year.
- Make them concrete and measurable: “Exceed my previous year’s sales figures by 30 percent.”

Goal 1	
Goal 2	
Goal 3	
Goal 4	
Goal 5	

## STEP 3: SHARE A GOAL WITH THE GROUP

 Group activity

 10 minutes

- One by one, go around your Circle and share one of your top goals.
- At this stage, you may want to add to or edit your list of goals, inspired by what you’ve heard from others.

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## Activity 3: Break your goals into doable steps

🕒 Approx. 20 minutes

### STEP 1: BRAINSTORM STEPS TOWARDS YOUR GOAL

👤 Individual activity

🕒 Approx. 10 minutes

- Choose one of the top goals you identified in Activity 2.
- In the box below, brainstorm a list of all the actionable steps you can think of to get you there.
  - For instance, if your goal is to make an ambitious sales target, you might write, “Analyze current client list for growth potential,” “Increase phone client contacts to once a week,” and “Approach management about increasing my sales travel budget.”

Brainstorm steps needed to reach your goal

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## STEP 2: IDENTIFY IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

 Individual activity

 5 minutes

- Figure out which one or two small steps you want to do next, and write them down.
  - For example: "Schedule coffee with last year's top-earning sales manager to learn more about how she did it."

Step 1	
Step 2	

## STEP 3: SHARE NEXT STEPS WITH THE GROUP

 Group activity

 5 minutes

- Go around your Circle and share some of your immediate next steps.
- At this stage, you may want to edit your list of next steps, inspired by what you've heard from others.

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## Activity 4: Put the next steps on your schedule

 Individual activity

 Approx. 5 minutes

To make sure your priorities make it into your schedule, it's helpful to calendar them in advance every week.

- You can do this on Friday afternoon, like Laura, or some time each weekend.
- Choose the same time every week so it becomes a habit.
- You may even want to schedule your time for scheduling so that it actually happens.

**Try it now:** Take a few moments to schedule small steps toward your big goals on your calendar for next week.

- If your calendar is on your phone, open it up and add your two next steps in time slots that work for you.
- The next steps might take more time than you think, so consider scheduling in some extra buffer time.
- If you don't have access to your calendar, make a note to schedule the two time blocks (and how long they should be) as soon as you can.



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## Activity 5 (for extra credit): Track your time

 Individual activity—do at home over the next week or two

A key step toward spending your time better is to learn how you're really spending it already. The exercise below is a time audit that shows you exactly how you use your time. You can do it over the next week or two after your Circle meeting is over.

- Download an Excel or PDF time log from [Laura Vanderkam's website](#).
- Over the next week, make brief notes every few hours on how you've spent your time. If you do this three to four times per day, that should be often enough.
- Keep going for a week or two to get a detailed picture of how you spend your time.
- After you're done, add up the hours devoted to major categories—work, sleep, family time, housework, TV, exercise, volunteering, commuting, social media, internet use, shopping.
  - You may want to break "work" into subcategories to learn more about your workday: "meetings," "email," "completing projects," and so on.
- Ask yourself:
  - What am I happy about in my schedule?
  - What would I like to spend more or less time on?
- Then make changes. Schedule the things that matter most to you, even if you wouldn't normally do so. For instance, if you want to spend more time writing a book, exercising, or reading to your kids, put those things on your calendar.

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## 3 One Action

*The little push you need to go for it*

 Group activity

 5 minutes

We recommend you close every meeting by committing to a “One Action”—one concrete thing you’re going to do before your next Circle meeting to step outside your comfort zone or practice a new skill.

This week, you might use your Circle to keep you accountable. Commit to updating your Circle on whether you complete the two next steps you scheduled in Activity 4. Or you could commit to completing the time-tracking exercise in Activity 5 as a One Action, too.

You can agree to share your updates by email at the end of the following week, or share them out loud with your Circle next time you meet.

### Share your One Action with your Circle

One by one, go around your Circle and complete the following statements:

- Over the next month, I commit to taking two small steps so that I can achieve a big goal. I realize that to get there I might have to change how I approach my schedule.
  - The big goal I want to achieve is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - The immediate step I want to take in the next month is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - To ensure that happens, I plan to \_\_\_\_\_.

Move quickly from member to member, and consider cheering one another on as you go.

**Housekeeping note:** We recommend you give an update on your One Action during your next meeting. On page 14 of this PDF, you’ll find an optional worksheet to help you prepare your update.

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## 4 Wrap-Up

*What's next and a few final words*

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

### Step 1: Finalize logistics of your next meeting

👥 Group activity

🕒 Approx. 10 minutes

Before you break, make sure you have the basics covered for your next meeting, including day and time, location, and food and drink responsibilities. Decide what you're going to do when you get together or who is going to send out ideas. You may also want to talk through what worked—and what didn't—in today's meeting so you can brainstorm improvements going forward.

### Step 2: Close on an energetic and inspirational note

👥 Group activity

🕒 5 minutes or less

- Think of one small moment of joy you can plan for this week. Go around your Circle one by one and share what you'll do.

**CONGRATULATIONS ON A GREAT MEETING.**

See the following page for a One Action Update Worksheet.

# One Action Update

Use the following prompts to prepare your One Action Update before your next meeting, to maximize your time with your Circle.

- What were the two next steps that you put onto your calendar?

- Did you complete them?

- Do you feel that you made progress toward your big goal?

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- What did you learn that you'll implement in the future?

- Do you plan to continue calendaring small steps towards your goal?

- If you didn't complete your next steps on time, is there anything you can change that would help you actually do them? For instance, could you schedule them for a different time that would make them easier to accomplish??