

The Pre-Meeting Brief

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Walk in ready. One page, ten minutes of prep, every meeting that matters.

The brief (fill it before you walk in)

The room. Who's in it, and what each person needs to walk out with. One line each. If you can't fill a line, you don't know why they're coming — which means they'll set the agenda for you.

My three outcomes. What I need from this meeting, ranked. Not topics — outcomes: "a decision on the vendor," "a commitment on the date," "a name for the owner." A meeting with no outcomes is an email wearing a suit.

My two questions. The questions I should ask that I probably won't unless they're written down. The best ones usually start with "what would have to be true..." or "who's against this internally?"

The landmine. The thing that could blow this up, named in advance. An old decision, a rival, a number someone will ask about. Knowing it's coming converts a bomb into a talking point.

My walk-away line. The one sentence I'll say if I need to slow things down: "Before we commit, I want to see [X]." Prepared in advance so it comes out calm instead of improvised under pressure.

The five-minute version (when there's no time)

1. Who's against what I want, and why?
2. What's the one number I should know cold?
3. What do I actually need from these people?

If you can only do three, do three. The brief's value isn't the document — it's the ten minutes of thinking the document forces.

After (two minutes)

One line in your notes: what you committed to, what they committed to, what changed. The meeting's real output is the delta — and it evaporates within 48 hours if not written down.

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