



Five Ways to Find Silence

MEETING SUPPLEMENT | SEPTEMBER 2021

FROM "GOLDEN: The Power of Silence in a World of Noise" by Justin Zorn & Leigh Marz (HarperCollins Publishers)

EXERCISE ONE

Get Experimental

Consider what you really want or need with respect to silence in your workplace. Start a conversation. Envision an experiment. At some organizations, it's "no email Fridays" or "no meeting Wednesdays." At others, it's eliminating the expectation of being available and on electronic devices during weekends or after 5pm. For some workplaces, a redesign of the floor plan might help specific kinds of workers get the focus that they need. Launch your experiment. Harvest lessons learned. Refine your experiment. Iterate. Make sure it's safe for the experiment to fail. Design to learn—not to get it right the first time. With a little creativity and experimentation, you can transform seemingly intractable norms of noise.

EXERCISE TWO

"Ma" on the Job

Enshrine the value of Ma—reverence for the empty spaces "in between"—in the culture of your organization. Start with group activities: For example, build in sanctioned time for quiet reflection, even within large discussions. In group brainstorming, safeguard the option to "sleep on a question," revisiting an inquiry fresh the next day. Consider new possibilities, like nonverbal report-outs, or post-it note galleries of ideas on the walls so people can silently peruse and vote on ideas anonymously. Make space in order to encourage quieter voices and more marginalized perspectives to reach the center. You can bring the value of Ma into the structure of the workday, too. Schedule time for preparation—before starting a new project or heading into a meeting. Block off time for transitions between meetings and events; avoid scheduling back-to-back. Even 5 minutes—even 5 breaths—can make a difference. And finally, remember to schedule time for reflection and integration, especially for important and difficult projects.

EXERCISE THREE

Deep Work, Together

Find a partner and make a pact to support each other's pristine attention. This may be a fellow team member or, if you work independently, another freelancer in need of focused work time. Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based) goals together. Work in parallel. Be accountable to one another. Work together to avoid distraction, like how the members of the Curie family worked together to find "perfect concentration."

EXERCISE FOUR

Sitting in the Fire

Next time you and your team are in conflict, consider gently requesting a couple minutes of silence before continuing. If the matter is heated and needs more space, consider asking for a recess until the following day (or the following week). The idea is to create adequate space for people to shift from purely oppositional stances. The more a team turns to silence in these moments, the more effective this method will become and the more enduring your group decisions will be.

EXERCISE FIVE

Slow Down, There Isn't Much Time

When you find yourself grappling with a problem that is both urgent and important, go against the grain: slow down. Rather than amping up the sound and intensity, seek quiet. If it's possible, take a break. Or have a nap. Read some poetry. Play catch with your dog. Make art. Head out into nature. Take a bath. Rest. Engage in an activity (or non-activity) that helps you feel and be expansive. In this expanded state, open yourself to new information. Invite in divergent thinking. Let ideas marinate over one good night's sleep. Then, gather again to focus on the issue. Notice what emerges.

