



# The Ins And Outs Of The Walk-And-Talk Meeting

Insights

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If you could have any super power, what would it be? Many would ask for perfect timing, because timing is everything. An individual with great timing would be hilarious, an amazing investor, great at any timing-based sports, always in place at the right time, and never wasteful of the one thing we cannot get more of—time.

We commonly talk about the metaphor of time as a commodity: “You’re wasting my time,” “How do you spend your time?,” “I don’t have enough time to spare,” “You’re running out of time,” “Do you have any time left?” It comes as no surprise that companies are thinking outside the box when it comes to maximizing employees’ time. The most recent trend, originally popularized by Steve Jobs and Jed Bartlet, is the “walk-and-talk” meeting.

A walk-and-talk (or walking meeting) is nothing more than a meeting that takes place during a walk instead of at an office, conference room, restaurant, or coffee shop. These meetings are increasingly popular because: (1) it enables them to get some exercise during a meeting; (2) research from Stanford suggests it increases creative thinking; and (3) there is no time wasted; there is a natural end to a walking meeting with a predetermined route—the same cannot be said about generic meetings.

## Potential Pitfalls

All that said, there are areas of potential concern that employers should consider before considering this new trend. First, what happens if someone is mobility-impaired and would rather not join a walking meeting? One possible solution could be to ensure the meeting is not an impromptu or ill-defined session. Instead, managers can provide proper lead-time and a predetermined route for any walk-and-talk meetings, allowing any employee to raise concerns they may have related to their mobility, the length of the walk, the route taken, or the fact that they are being asked to walk.

Second, should an employee raise a concern, the question then becomes: What accommodation should be made? The employer may want to engage in an interactive process with the employee and discuss the employee’s issue with the proposed walk-and-talk meeting. It may be that the employee is only capable of a 30-minute walk as opposed to a 45-minute walk, or would rather avoid a strenuous walking path (involving stairs, or hills, or uneven ground). Given that it is relatively easy to cut 15 minutes out of a meeting or to adjust the route, it may be in the best interest of the employer to agree to such a proposed accommodation.

Finally, it is imperative that the employer does not exclusively use walk-and-talk meetings. The last thing an employer wants is for mobility-impaired individuals to feel that they are excluded from being invited to certain meetings. Instead, these meetings should be reserved for one-on-one meetings, with the primary focus on creativity and strategy. By keeping the walk-and-talk meetings small, the employer is reducing the implication that one has to participate in these meetings to be part of the team.

### **Practical Walk-And-Talk Tips For Employers**

To minimize ADA risks and to maximize the benefits of a walk-and-talk meeting, we recommend the following:

1. **Small Meetings Only:** The larger the group, the harder it is to engage in meaningful dialogue. Certain members will inevitably be stuck behind the main talking group and could feel not part of the team.
2. **Plan Your Route:** This ensures that all participants know the reasonable length of the meeting. It also minimizes the risk of a mobility-impaired employee coming across difficult or unknown terrain. By providing the proposed route ahead of time, all participants know what they are getting into and whether they are physically capable of handling the proposed route.
3. **Be Selective With The Meetings:** Walk-and-talk meetings should be limited to meetings where creation, thinking outside-the-box, or strategizing is the focus. Document-intensive meetings, or those involving sensitive subjects should remain in the office (especially disciplinary meetings). The last thing an employer wants is to imply to employees that every meeting must be a walk-and-talk. Minimizing that implication reduces the risk of a mobility-impaired employee from stating he or she felt obligated to participate in the walk-and-talk.
4. **No Surprises:** Do not spring a walk-and-talk meeting on an employee. Last minute walk-and-talks enhance the likeliness of an unprepared, embarrassed employee, feeling obligated to participate in the meeting. By providing adequate lead-time, employees will be able to dress appropriately and assess their physical capacity on the given day.
5. **Be Okay With 'No':** If an employee declines, do not take that as an opportunity to discuss the creative or health benefits of a walk-and-talk meeting. Graciously accept their rejection and move forward with the planned meeting in the office.

Walk-and-talk meetings are part of the present and are not going away in the future. As the workforce becomes more vigilant about their time and how to maximize the work/life balance, the walk-and-talk meeting will become more prevalent in the workplace. It is important to remember that, although these meetings allow one to couple work with exercise, the above steps should be taken to minimize potential legal liability.

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