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Best Practice for Virtual Meetings

Dear Members:

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As coronavirus (COVID-19) forces more employees to work from home, businesses are adapting to a new remote-work business model quickly and effectively. Fortunately, technology has made things a lot easier as many companies are using virtual meetings and conference calls to keep in touch.

It is not simple for every organization to transition their in-person meeting structure to video conferencing and expect the same results. Video conferencing can make it more difficult to ensure everybody has a chance to speak, each attendee is paying full attention, meeting time is being used wisely, etc.

Here are some tips and tricks to ensure that your virtual meetings run as effectively and productively as possible:

1. Do a test run

Do a test run with a colleague or friend to assess personal body language and facial expressions. Be mindful of your habits and adjust them accordingly. (My Zoom meetings made me hyper-aware that I have intense facial expressions when I speak and listen to others. I am a happy-go-lucky person but have very serious facial expressions when I work, which I did not realize until recently. This is something I consciously work on now.)

2. Check your surroundings

Assess the environment around you before the meeting. What's in the background? What noises can be heard? Are there any distractions that will sidetrack the conversation?

3. Dress code is still in play

Dress as you would for the meeting in-person. You must still leave a good impression and it is more difficult to do this online than in person, so every little bit helps. Whether you are at home or in the office, it's vital to set high expectations and show that the environment around you does not impact your work ethic.

4. Maintain decorum

Be respectful. Having meetings digitally is awkward. Make sure there are no distractions around you, just like you would in person: turn the phone off and silence any computer notifications. Only keep your notes in front of you so you can focus solely on the meeting. If you are distracted by a dog or child or beeping phone, it will be very obvious to others. Also, tell the other attendees if/when you have a notepad in front of you, so they know that when you look down, it is to make some notes and your attention is still with them.

5. Say NO to your phone

Make your phone inaccessible. Move it to the other side of the room or turn it off so you can give the other person your full attention. Even the best multi-taskers tune out as soon as they look at their phone. Checking messages or social media can wait as the people you are meeting with deserve your undivided attention. We are inundated with technology and it's obvious when someone is being distracted by messages, etc.

6. Keep your references ready

Be sure that any show-and-tell items you would make available in-person can be shared in other ways, such as via screen sharing or email.

7. Have a backup plan

Be prepared for the internet connection or virtual meeting platform to lag or stop altogether. These systems are being used right now more than ever and may experience problems beyond anyone's control.

Communicate a plan of attack ahead of time in case one or both of you lose the connection and need to pick up by phone. Nothing is more awkward than when each person is trying to call back, and neither can get through.

8. Don't let the battery die

Make sure you have sufficient power to attend the full meeting. Digital meetings can use much more power than other day-to-day uses, especially if you are using a mobile device. Make sure your phone, tablet or laptop is fully charged.

9. Let's meet MUTE

Don't be afraid to use the mute button. When meeting with multiple people, it can increase the quality of the meeting and limit interruptions. Nothing is more frustrating than random noises or sneezes from the interwebs.

Virtual Meeting Platforms

Here are some commonly used platforms for virtual meetings. You can choose yours as per your team size and availability.

- Zoom - <https://zoom.us/>
- Skype - <https://www.skype.com/en/>
- GoToMeeting - <https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-ca>
- Google Hangout - <https://hangouts.google.com/>
- FaceTime - <https://support.apple.com/en-ca/HT204380>
- Facebook Messenger - <https://www.messenger.com/>