Video conferencing best practices

In our increasingly virtual work environment, our ingenuity and resourcefulness help keep us connected with our clients and colleagues. Video conferencing and online meetings establish deeper relationships and encourage meaningful collaboration through personal connections. We know it works, but there's no denying video conferencing can be a little intimidating.

As our daily work environment moves to a more virtual space, we've compiled 10 tips for conducting professional meetings from wherever you find yourself working these days.

Tip 1:

Find a private place to take the call

Minimize background noise as much as possible and use a headset if needed. If you have housemates, children or a partner who are also working from home (or just stuck at home), let them know you will be in a meeting to minimize interruptions. Avoid picking up extra background noise by muting your microphone when you are not speaking.

Tip 2:

Adjust your camera angle

Make sure your camera has a clear, unobstructed view of you. Don't sit too far from (or too close to) the camera. The optimal distance you should be from the camera is about 24 inches (60 centimeters). Put the camera at eye level, so that when you're looking at the screen, it appears as if you're looking at the person you're talking to.

Tip 3:

Ensure proper lighting

Make sure your face is well lit. Natural lighting and side lighting work best. If you're backlit or in a shadow, your colleagues and clients won't be able to see much. To alleviate this frustration, position yourself in front of a window for some natural light.

Tip 4:

Present a professional background

Clean up the area around you. Open the camera on your laptop or switch on your external camera and see what's visible in the background before the call (so put away your laundry and make sure whatever's on your walls is work-appropriate). Many video conferencing services have virtual or blur background features. If you are using Microsoft Teams, click here for Tips for blurring your background in a Teams meeting.

Tip 5:

Check your appearance

One of the best parts about working from home is getting to wear lounge clothes all day, but it is important to dress professionally for a video call. Dress how you would for an in-person meeting (at least from the waist up). Avoid patterns or stripes which can be distracting on camera. Wearing a bright white shirt or black shirt may cause your camera to auto-adjust the brightness and make it hard to see your face.

Tip 6:

Test your connection

Test your video conferencing software before the call, especially if you've never used it before. Also, make sure you have a strong Wi-Fi connection and that your device is either plugged in or fully charged.

Give yourself a few extra minutes before the call to set up and log onto the call a little early, especially if you're unfamiliar with the software that your host is using. Once the call has started, check to see if everyone can hear and see each other. A good way to do this is by having everyone introduce themselves.

Tip 7:

Check in with your audience

It is not as easy to read the room on a video conference. Make sure that from covering the agenda at the top of the call to closing remarks – your audience is following and with you. You may need to be more expressive and animated to carry an audience, while not going over the top.

Tip 8:

Stay focused

Be attentive and engaged during the call. As tempting as it is, try to not do any other work or send emails. Don't look at your phone and don't eat! Look into the camera when you talk. If you look at yourself or others on your screen, it may appear that you are looking at something else. When you are not talking, make sure you pay attention to whoever is speaking or sharing their screen. Remember others can see where you are looking.

Tip 9:

Engage your audience through storytelling

Storytelling is a key component of an engaging meeting. Think about ways you can share your meeting content through a story. Stories grab our attention and compel the audience to focus on what is coming next. Imagine you dial into a meeting and the host starts by saying, "Today I'd like to discuss several ways to ...."

Now imagine your meeting starts with, "Let me begin with a brief story. Last year, our client faced a similar challenge with xyz, we partnered alongside them to ..."

Tip 10:

Be agile

Sometimes technology won't be your friend even after meticulous advanced planning. Be prepared with a backup plan if you are faced with technical glitches during your virtual meeting. Stay calm, confident and don't panic. You can offer to reschedule or dial in by phone. Mistakes happen - how you respond to them is what matters most.

Stay connected

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