

# 6 BEST PRACTICES for Leading Effective [Virtual] Meetings

## AND THE REMOTE REALITIES OF VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION

Conducting virtual meetings is increasingly the norm and not the exception. And while virtual meetings can connect people around the globe efficiently, it's important to lead them effectively so you can get the outcomes you desire. Effective virtual meetings can take a little more time to plan, but a few moments of intentionality can improve the outcome of your virtual meetings.

What can a leader do to help ensure meetings go well, and what are the implications when factoring in remote attendees? Here are some best practices for conducting successful meetings and implications when remote attendees are the reality.

### 1 Create Efficient Agendas

Create, and send in advance, an agenda that will help you and your meeting participants focus. A good rule of thumb is to include topic, outcome, and actions so you can ensure accountability. Outcomes include what needs to happen, for example, discussions, decisions, or documentation. Actions include reviewing the agenda, reading something in advance, or coming prepared to discuss an issue.

#### THE REMOTE REALITY #1

Keeping attention focused on the task at hand for virtual attendees presents challenges because participants don't have the benefit of tuning in to all that is happening in the room. An agenda helps virtual attendees stay on the same page. It can be helpful to share your screen with the agenda, and take notes on it to keep all attendees on track.

### 2 Alert Attendees to the Need for their Contributions

Your team members will be more effective with advanced notice – let them know what you want them to cover so they can be ready when you throw a question their way. To enhance preparedness, alert them to what documents you will be referencing.

#### THE REMOTE REALITY #2

With a virtual team member, you'll need to be mindful of taking the extra step to email, text, or call them to let them know what you'll need from them. Don't catch them off guard in the meeting; give them some time to show up as their best selves.

### 3 Start with Agenda Review and Introductions

Even if you are pressed for time, a quick round of introductions lets others know who is in the meeting, what their roles are, and to whom they should direct questions. Call on team members and use their names whenever possible – this simple step lets them know you value their input and enhances trust, communication, and rapport.

#### THE REMOTE REALITY #3

Virtual attendees can't always see who is in the room nor can they introduce themselves as naturally. Introductions are important for virtual attendees to feel included.

## 4 Engage Visually

Using visuals can help keep team members engaged. Prepare quick slides or visuals, if time allows, to help communicate your point. Use whiteboards or flipcharts to help capture key points, get individuals moving, or focus the group on key discussion points and takeaways.

## 5 Create Connection

A team that establishes trust and builds connection is a more cohesive, engaged, and, ultimately, productive team. Use the few minutes at the outset of a meeting to connect on a human level through conversations or through a rapport-building activity. Explore visual prompts or inject a little fun into your ice breakers to jumpstart the interaction and set a friendly tone.

## 6 Ensure Engagement

Nothing kills engagement in a meeting faster than one-way communication. Even if the meeting includes a presentation, find ways to get your attendees to participate. Pause along the way, ask questions, invite discussion, and don't be afraid to call on team members to gently get their contributions. Creating space for discussion allows attendees to fully engage during the time you have with them.

**Close out the meeting with confirmed outcomes and next steps – be certain to email follow-ups, so all attendees can be clear on what happens after the meeting.**

### THE REMOTE REALITY #4

Many remote meetings take place over Teams, GoToMeeting, or WebEx. Start a trend by using your webcam whenever you can. That way, others feel comfortable using their cameras as well, and you can begin to develop a closer relationship based on communication with physical cues and interactions. This will also allow virtual team members to see what's being presented or shown to the other meeting attendees. Remember that if this is not your norm, give advance notice or set a schedule for webcam use so people know what to expect.

### THE REMOTE REALITY #5

Rapport building that happens more naturally as attendees gather in person can leave virtual attendees feeling left out. To shift that, start with a team-building activity to generate "virtual rapport." Asking attendees what their favorite dessert is or what book they are currently reading is a non-invasive way of lightening the mood and establishing a friendly connection. Be certain to give advance notice of icebreakers to give those who need more time to process their answer, the opportunity to think and prepare.

### THE REMOTE REALITY #6

You can keep virtual attendees active and engaged. Invite their contributions by calling on them by name. Be certain to call on virtual attendees who may go silent during part of the call to keep them engaged; this practice lets them know you value their contributions. Use voting, chat polls, and emojis to allow virtual employees to contribute using technology.

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