

Virtual Meetings Video Transcript

- Meetings are increasingly becoming virtual, either by phone conference or video conference, Skype and FaceTime, and making these kinds of meetings easy and cheap. And with home working and international collaboration on the increase, it's going to become more and more common to meet via computer screen. But these virtual meetings do come with their own particular issues. The problems divide into two main areas, which are the technical problems, getting the software and hardware to work, and the human problems, which mainly stem from the fact that their all-important body language isn't part of the communication process, particularly when the picture is blurry or it's audio-only, so they can't see each other at all. I've got some great suggestions for overcoming both the technical and the human problems coming right up. So, you might want to get hold of a pen and paper and make notes from my top 10 tips for virtual meetings, which are as follows.

Number one, use visual rather than just audio, if you possibly can. Phone conference calls with three or more people are always less successful, because so much body language is removed. And the technology for video calls is cheap, often free, and the bandwidth, usually sufficient for it. So, if in doubt, choose video every time.

Number two, check the equipment and software before the call and allow plenty of time for this. When you find that the sound isn't working, it'll take you at least five minutes, probably more like 15, to crawl under your desk and check the wire to the webcam, or to reboot your computer. So, make a note in your calendar to be ready at least 15 minutes before the call.

Number three, think particularly about the audio quality of the call. If you're using just audio and it's a conference call, then the audio is all you've got. But even if you're using video as well, it's the audio that matters most. Consider using a headset, so that you don't get a problem with the sound coming out of your speakers and going back into your microphone, which leads to the other parties hearing themselves coming back as an echo. And consider using a good quality microphone so you sound clear and authoritative. A headset's only going to cost you 10 or \$20. A good microphone might cost you 100, but it's worth considering.

Number four, exchange mobile phone numbers beforehand so that when you're trying to connect if there are any problems with sound, you can call each other up and explain what the problem is and what you're doing about it.

Number five, it's worth knowing the features that your software gives you. For example, screen sharing can be really useful. And, for some meetings, it can be useful to be able to take polls or to write text comments at the same time as the conversation. Have a trial run with a friend and try out some of the fancy features, and discover which ones are easy to use and see what you find useful. You could even consider asking a colleague who uses virtual technology a lot if they have any tips about features within the software.

Number six is to think about who you invite. Even more so than with face-to-face meetings, it's vital to keep the numbers low. Each extra person doubles the complexity of the relationships that are going on in the meeting. So, from three to four, or four to five is a big step, and one that you don't want to take if you can possibly avoid it.

Number seven, if there are going to be five people or more in the meeting, I like the idea of keeping a written note of who has said what. Not everything, but just the main views of each person. Then you can be sure not to miss anyone. If your paper is blank for someone, you can say, "Diane, I didn't hear your views "on this part of the subject. "Can you tell us what you think?"

Number eight, if it's an audio call and you don't know each other very well, at least for your first few inputs, introduce yourself with, "Chris here again and I just want to say" and encourage the others to do the same, so that people can know for sure who is who. Also, to make sure that nobody gets forgotten, consider polling around the group, so that each person gets half a minute to say what they think. This means that everyone gets involved, the quiet ones have to make an input, and you can keep a track easily of who thinks what.

Number nine, consider sending a visual aid beforehand so that everyone has something to refer to. Certainly, an agenda would be good, but I'm also thinking more of a diagram or list that the group can all look at. Whether it's an audio or a video meeting, there still needs to be something for everyone to clearly see and focus on that's the same for everyone.

And, finally, number 10. It's only a small point, but I think it's worth considering your setting or background. What's behind you when you're making a video call? Do you want to project a professional image? Is it worth moving a

couple of things out the way before you start your call? So, there we are, 10 ideas for making your virtual meetings as good as they can be within the limitations of technology.

What changes are you going to make to the way that you run and attend these types of meetings in order to make them great? Use the notetaking tool to answer this question.