

Virtual Meetings are Here to Stay: Top Tips for Real Success

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Virtual meetings are now a feature of everyday working life. During lockdowns, they proved a rare benefit of an otherwise challenging time. Not only are they time and cost-effective, but they also create a convenient way for companies across industries, and continents, to conduct business, allowing greater connectivity far beyond the four walls of a conventional office.

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1. Choose Your Environment Carefully

In the same way, in-person conference rooms have certain requirements, so do virtual meeting rooms. Make sure that you set yourself up in a well-lit, private, and quiet space. If you don't like your background or are in a messy bedroom - blur it or upload a stock background. If you share space with others, make sure they are aware that you're in a meeting.

2. Turn off so you can Switch on

Don't forget to close any unnecessary - or confidential - tabs, turn off notifications, and put your phone on silent before you join the meeting. You want to be able to give attendees your undivided attention.

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3. Dress for Success

It's well known that how you look affects how you feel, and what you wear can either have a positive, or a negative impact on your confidence, as well as the impression you leave your fellow attendees with. It's just as true online. So it makes sense to dress like you would if you were conducting the meeting in-person - at least from the waist up!

4. Make Your Presence Known

Being the first person to engage in conversation is a power move. If there are only a few people on the call, speaking first and boldly introducing yourself not only displays confidence but also sets a positive tone that encourages others to follow. When the meeting contains many people, it's easy to get lost in a sea of little windows and domineering voices, making it even more crucial for you to make your presence known.

5. Mind Your Manners

At the beginning of the call, once everyone's introduced themselves and the pleasantries are over, mute your microphone while others speak (unless advised otherwise), and raise a virtual hand when you have something to add. It's important that attendees see that you are engaged in the meeting. It can be tempting to 'zone out', especially if there is a topic of discussion that doesn't directly affect you. To avoid that, look directly into the camera.

Caveat! - Some virtual meetings do have a more 'informal' tone, but even so, try to avoid eating, glancing at your phone, or answering chats and emails during the call.

6. Keep it Concise

When adding to the conversation, try to keep your thoughts as concise as possible and avoid 'waffling' on. Stick to the topic at hand and remember that everyone is busy - pointless, or off-topic ramblings derail the conversation and tend to waste time. Always ask yourself: "will this comment/statement/argument/opinion/question add value? If the answer is no, perhaps pocket it for later.

7. Make an Impact

Depending on the nature of your meeting and whether you're presenting, make sure that you have all the necessary documents and tools on hand and that you know how to share your screen. Sharing visual and audio aids is a great way to add impact and create an engaging atmosphere. Don't forget about the chat section, it's particularly handy for circulating links, information, and other resources to members without interrupting the flow of dialogue.

8. Know Your Platforms

If you've been invited by an external company to join a virtual meeting, make sure you know which platform the meeting is being hosted on. Next, check whether or not you need to download the platform beforehand.

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9. Give Yourself Enough Time

Technology has a habit of turning on us when we least expect it. To make sure you don't suffer from any connectivity, sound, camera, or lighting issues, give yourself enough time before your meeting starts to check that everything works properly - especially if it's a different platform from your usual.

10. Summarize

If possible, as in any meeting, a good way to end is to run through a brief summary of the discussion and to clarify action points. Not only will this demonstrate that you were paying full attention and inspire trust with your fellow members, it will also add value by reiterating the meeting's key takeaways.

11. Get it on Record

Sometimes it's useful to record your virtual meeting, either by using the built-in recording device of the platform (with everyone's permission of course), by using your mobile device's memo function or by making typed/written notes. This will enable you to refer to the important information that was discussed if/when need be.

So, while most of your meetings have moved from boardrooms to Zoom or Teams calls (and are likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future), you'll still have every chance to experience genuine human connection, as well as the opportunity to impress.