

Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Most of our work worlds drastically shifted overnight. We now live in the world of virtual meetings and remote networking. We have never been more exposed, and the need for self-awareness has never been more necessary. If you're like me, you've already been privy to (no pun intended) some surprising etiquette situations. Common sense for virtual meetings is not so common. Considering the new normal for communication, I wanted to spotlight how to remain professional when we're working in our private spaces. Take this all tongue-in-cheek.

1. **Test your audio & video:** <https://Zoom.us/test>
2. **Be mindful of mute.** If you aren't on mute, we can hear **everything**. That includes the construction behind your house, your typing, your coughing, your dog, your microwave, your chewing, and when you fart. Not even kidding. If you are multi-tasking during a webinar, make sure that you are on mute! If you learn just one thing from this writing, let this be it.
3. **Dress to impress.** Unless you typically roll into work wearing your hunter plaid pajamas (that was me drinking coffee this morning), or wearing a sweatshirt with no pants, you need to wake up and "get ready for work." Business casual is totally okay! Even if "going to work" means that you are now walking 15 feet from the kitchen to your home-office, you still need to go through the motions. Some of that has to do with just shifting your mindset from being relaxed at home, to being engaged in your workday.
4. **Be on time!** Back-to-back virtual meetings means that there's little-to-no time between calls for you to take care of personal needs. If you can, try to space out your calls. Plan for breaks! Or if you can't do that, log on on-time, but keep your video off. When you show up "late" and apologize to the group, it stops the momentum of the presentation.
5. **Visibility.** If you haven't already, please clean your camera lens. Regardless of if you're using your laptop, iPad, or cell phone to participate in a video call you need to make sure you're visible **on** camera. No one wants to see just your ear, or only your ceiling. The reason we're on a video call is to make sure we can see each other, face-to-face. If your placement is off, it makes the call extremely weird. Also know, if you wear glasses we might be able to see the reflection from your screen.
6. **Being stationary.** To piggyback off being visible, we also need to highlight movement. If you need to walk away from your laptop, or what to change locations, please temporarily turn off your camera. The rest of us on the call will be extremely distracted with your movements. If you cannot be visible, then don't use video at all. Just be on audio. And please, revert to #1. And whatever you do, don't take your laptop around with you. Especially if you need to [go to the bathroom](#).
7. **Pay attention to nonverbals.** We can see you. We can **all** see you (if your video is on). If you are rolling your eyes, waving your hands, making funny faces, or clearly texting on your phone, this is all sharing valuable information

about who you are as a person to all the other participants in the video call. Be self-aware.

8. **Know your environment.** Do you have a mirror behind your camera, and you don't have pants on? Is the kitchen right behind your desk and your [kids are now on camera](#)? Do you have [artwork that may be offensive](#) to others? Or are you sitting on a couch with your laptop on your lap and the camera angle is highlighting what's up your nose? We need to switch up locations so we aren't getting bored, however it's important to do a test run and know what will be visible to anyone else who can see you!
9. **Understand the purpose of the meeting.** Is this a consultation call? Is it a professional-member organization webinar? Is it a lecture for a college class? Is it a tour and meet & greet of a mental healthcare program? Is it a panel on a trending topic within your industry? Or is it a family happy hour? It doesn't matter what it is, just keep in mind the purpose of that meeting. In knowing the purpose, also know whether the presenter is expecting to see you. If yes, please be on video! All of these can be fun or informative. Regardless, just know which one is which at the appropriate times and be present.

Now for those of us hosting, we need to get creative too! Your leadership during this time will be paramount to the success and [productivity of your meeting](#). There is nothing worse than hearing several folks in the background while someone is giving a presentation. Here are some great tips for facilitation and managing your video calls:

1. **Give a quick tour.** This may sound silly, but it needs to be done. For someone who is new to Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc. they may not know where things are. Show them before you get the presentation started! This needs to include how they mute/unmute, how they turn on/off video, the "raising a hand" button, or where the chat feature is. We're all going to be pros with this before too long!
2. **Establish ground rules.** You can whip out Robert's Rules of Order, or you can simply state: "Please keep on mute, the purpose of the meeting is x, and we'd like to spend x amount of time listening, then leaving x amount of time for questions. If you have a question, please type it in the chat box. And thank you for being here!"
3. **Have an agenda.** If you are only hosting a meeting, but not a panel, you need to have an agenda. Either have it created and distributed prior to the meeting or ask for audience participation within the first few minutes. If there are specific topics that participants want to discuss, make sure they're discussed.
4. **Place all participants on mute.** In the beginning of the meeting, remind folks to remain on mute. You must be aggressively on top of making sure that those who aren't talking, are muted. If they aren't, you are dealing with extremely distracting call, especially if you have many participants.
5. **Settings are important.** If you are hosting a panel, make it so that the panelists are the ones that are visible and/or distinguished. You can change the settings to include only those who are presenting to be visible. If you do that, they encourage all participants to "say hi" in the chat feature so you know who was in attendance.

6. **Keep time!** If you are hosting a panel, it's important to ensure there is plenty of time to facilitate all panelists answering predetermined questions, and then leave time for a participant Q&A directed towards the panelists.
7. **Encourage participant engagement.** This goes back to #1 for group facilitators. Have them raise their hand to be called on, or type in a question in the chat feature. If it's a panel, meeting, or presentation you want to get participants involved.
8. **Most importantly - be assertive!** As the moderator or facilitator, you can't be afraid to hurt people's feelings. You can control turning people's audio on or off. You can show who is visible on screen. You can redirect the discussion if it goes sideways. You can keep on task and on time. If you are the leader, you must take charge!