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Building a better videoconference

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MDRT offers top-of-mind considerations for maximizing engagement during videoconferences.

Having participated in too many videoconferences to count, I can state emphatically that “great” and “videoconference meeting” do not belong in the same sentence, unless that sentence reads “There’s a videoconference meeting later today. Oh, great.” (And by great, you, of course, mean, “I’d like to jab a fork into my thigh. Many times.”)

The reason that there are few great videoconference meetings stems from the fact that there are few great meetings. Period. Sure, there can be productive meetings or important meetings and even fun meetings, but when it gets right down to it, the best meeting is a quick meeting. Add in virtual attendance with internet glitches and computer hiccups and, well, the prospect can be disappointing at best. Keep in mind, besides meeting with clients and prospects, you also can video chat with centers of influence who you might partner with in the future, pick the brains of fellow MDRT members and update staff working remotely.

All that notwithstanding, COVID-19 has made

videoconferences the lone method of real-time, group interaction for the foreseeable future, so you might as well get used to them. To maximize the effectiveness of hosting your own videoconference or joining one hosted by a colleague, we offer you these top-of-mind considerations:

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? WHY NOT?!

Depending on the privacy and security settings on your computer, the default microphone as you join a Zoom conference will probably be mute. Listen carefully as you join a meeting; Zoom will provide you with unmuting directions (hint: *6 on phones as of last week). Trust me: No matter how loud you yell, your colleagues will not be able to hear you until you unmute your line.

SHOW DESKTOPS, NOT HAIRCUTS

While it might seem neighborly to include thumbnail videos of everyone participating on your call, attendees might feel the approach intrusive and unnecessary — especially as shower/bath routines are ... well ... inconsistent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Don't mandate a video selfie component for every attendee. If you as the presenter want them to see you, that's fine. Verbal responses are more than sufficient when input is required.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Especially with dispersed teams, choosing a convenient time for all can be challenging. I typically go by the rule of making it no earlier than 8 a.m. for the latest time zone and no later than 5 p.m. for the earliest time zone. If that's not possible (participants are spread more than six hours apart), offer recorded videoconferences for those unable to attend.

STAY ORGANIZED

Impromptu videoconferences are a no-no. Prepare an outline

or talking points in advance and stick closely to your schedule. Include relevant and appealing visuals, if possible. This will maximize engagement among attendees.

THAT'S IT?! YES!

Finally: Keep. Things. Brief. Chances are, if you can cover your messaging outline in 25 minutes, you can safely cover the same material in 15. While collegial banter might seem appropriate, attendees will be far more grateful to dispense with the mundane and get down to business. Save chitchat for texts or social media posts; especially during the COVID-19 crisis, people are incredibly busy while trying to juggle work and their personal lives. Anything you can do to minimize a group meeting will go a much longer way toward establishing goodwill.

There are of course many more considerations, but the above should get you started on your way to a successful videoconference.

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