What Not To Do For Remote Meetings

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Work from home used to be experimental option in some IT companies but the coronavirus has accelerated this change into a way of life for most of us. One essential part of WFH has been numerous remote meetings, which may or may not include large number of participants depending on your work.

Tomes have been written on the etiquette and how to conduct virtual meetings but not much on what not to do in remote meetings. Here are a few tips based on my experience, and I can guarantee this will serve you great in your career.

* Don't conduct a large meeting without a moderator. Ensure that the moderator can use some virtual signals to allot time for talks in order to ensure that the participants do not feel they are in a panel.

* Don't wait till the last minute to log in. To ensure everything starts on time, log in at least 5 minutes before the start time and also allow the waiting room for earlier entrants. Do a test run of all features and requirements if you have important people including your big bosses attending.

* Don't forget to use the proper equipment. As a go-getter, you need to weigh how good the technology is at your end. The best practice would be to use a desktop computer with a quality camera, either separate from the monitor or built in. A laptop computer is next in preference. It gives you more mobility, but sacrifices on video quality both ways, as well as sound. Do an online speed check of your Internet connection before the meeting. Remember, some of your colleagues may use their smart phones for meetings, but tell them to use that only as a last resort.

* Don't sit with your back to the light. In virtual meetings people may not be bothered what you are wearing or where you are but they need to see your face. So ensure that you are not sitting in front of a window or with a light source behind you.

* Don't start without a meeting agenda. People tend to do random meetings for everything these days because of the ease of doing the same virtually and this is one reason for higher stress in WFH. Avoid this by setting a clear agenda for each meeting. Circulate the agenda in advance whether it is for information sharing, problem-solving or mere brainstorming.

* Don't invite those who are not necessary. If you want to ensure that everyone can participate in the discussions, limit the number to the most essential. 7-10 is ideal in my experience. Anything over that will result in a few people dominating the limelight, so to speak. You also need to decide if information sharing needs video meeting or just an email circular will suffice. Also some people may not need to be in the discussion but may be useful as listeners. So use appropriate tools to keep them silent and no off video.

* Don't distract yourself. Avoid multitasking while in the meeting and that means phone in silent mode, no texting, no notifications on the computer screen, etc. You may miss out on critical information while checking on your WA message. As a thumb rule if you find anyone doing other work while in the call, it is a sign they are not needed in the meeting. For your regular team meetings, phrase the rule of no other work and asking everyone to be in video.

* Don't encourage soliloquies. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak. Those who tend to dominate should be politely prodded to pause. You can set the trend by saying, "I have several points to share but I will start with one and once others have shared theirs I can examine if any of my other points are not covered."

* Don't overdo PowerPoint. If at all you have to use PPT, use fewer slides and use size of 30 or more. Use more imaged than sentences. A picture speaks 1000 words and so concepts will be understood better. Spend time preparing it and you will shine like a star.

* Don't ditch essential tenets of meetings. These include active listening ability, avoiding judgement, positive feedback, encouraging others to add value, etc. That doesn't imply you should not allow someone to play Devil's Advocate but he or she should be identified to do so.

* Don't neglect to send out minutes of the meeting. Someone in your team should be assigned the responsibility to make notes of the meeting and sending out a summary not later than 24 hours of the meeting. It should list the follow-up actions clearly and that shall be the top agenda item for the next meeting of that group, Make the summary bullet points and brief for easy reading and understanding of all participants. A written summary makes people more responsive to act.

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