How to be a Good Participant in Virtual Meetings

It's common knowledge that people multi-task during virtual meetings. We have to change that. Take ownership for your own participation in these meetings. If each of us follow these simple tips, we can make virtual meetings accomplish their purpose while maintaining a closer connection with virtual team members:

1. Prepare for the meeting. Keep track of your upcoming meetings, complete expected action items, review materials, and prepare for any parts you're delivering. Log in early.

2. Whenever possible, turn on your camera. It will feel uncomfortable at first, and that's normal. Know that video provides a closer connection among participants on virtual calls and keeps everyone focused on the meeting at hand. It inhibits multi-tasking and makes the meeting feel closer to an in-person event (see sidebar for tips on using your camera). Dress appropriately for the camera, knowing that dress expectations will vary by meeting. Casual dress is often acceptable.

3. Take ownership of your own participation. Your meeting behavior should match that of an in-person meeting. Put aside email and other projects and be fully present for the virtual meeting just as you would in-person.

4. Share the responsibility for an excellent meeting. Focus on the meeting purpose and desired outcome, stick to the agenda, and help make sure that everyone is heard and included. If you tend to speak early and often, moderate your participation so that others can be heard. If you tend to hold back, take opportunities to participate more frequently.

5. Be concise. Make your point in as few words as possible. It's good practice to quickly summarize your points, and be careful that you're not repeating yourself. Meeting time is precious.

6. If you are presenting and sharing your screen, be sure you turn off the preview pane for your emails. It's distracting and you may inadvertently share sensitive communications.

TIPS FOR USING YOUR CAMERA

An easy starting point is to agree with your immediate team to meet with video on. You can get comfortable with it with your internal team. Keep these tips in mind:

- Position your camera. If you simply tilt your computer upwards from its desktop position, the upward camera angle is awkward and usually unflattering. Raise the position of the camera so that it is level with your eyes.

- Notice what is showing behind you. Use preview to see how the image looks, and you may want to shift your camera so that there is a good backdrop behind you.

- Adjust the lighting as needed. You want a crisp image that's not washed out with backlight and where your image is not lost in shadow.

- Stay focused at the same level you would during an in-person meeting. Your facial expressions and body language should express interest and engagement.

7. Pause regularly when speaking so that others can ask questions or refocus the conversation. Use mute when you're not presenting and remember to unmute before speaking. Crispness and professionalism are paramount.

8. Be attentive to action items and follow up on commitments.

9. Avoid driving and attending a virtual meeting. You'll be distracted from both.

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