



Meeting Virtually? 7 Ways to Succeed

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It is a mistake to call virtual meetings 'virtual' because they physically exist!

They get a bad rap because we haven't yet mastered how to run them well. We laugh at (very funny) YouTube clips of poor virtual meetings and then continue to contribute to them being so.

Remember that **worst case** when what you wanted was five engaged brains on a conference call and what you got was two silent drivers, a harassed parent, somebody multi-tasking on the call trying to finish an urgent report and somebody in a hotel car park trying to get a signal. Each person thinking it's acceptable to dial in and announce "I'm going on mute", thinking that they're helping others on the call because they are reducing background noise. The result? You speaking into a void, not knowing if people are still on the call or how they are responding to what you're saying.

The truth is that despite the improvement in on-line platforms, we humans have dragged our heels when it comes to our mindset and behaviour when co-working 'virtually.' As such, face to face working is still the goal and virtual working remains, on the whole, sub-optimal and mostly second choice/second best.

Even today, as the world is being hit with coronavirus (COVID-19) and face to face meetings are being cancelled or postponed, the resistance to work virtually continues in some organisations.....

Realising the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on our rhythm of working is creeping over us like a slow, dark dawn. And, as with most enforced change, some may meet it with denial and resistance.

"We succeed or fail, gradually then suddenly, one conversation at a time." Susan Scott

Our acceptance will be slow and then sudden and we will be forced to accept a new normal because we have run out of options.

It's time to create the **best case** – a new way of working to bring about a world where businesses work leaner and smarter, and achieve the best ways to work across time zones, countries, regions or counties. A world where organisations stay connected and maximise co-working while keeping travel and accommodation costs down.

The big questions to ask are:

How can we work well virtually?

How can I keep my team connected?

How can I mitigate risk?

How can we continue to get work done well?

Here are 7 responses that will help you to succeed with virtual meetings.

1. ADAPT YOUR MINDSET

Decide to fully embrace the opportunity to master virtual meetings.

Look at it as a chance to develop a skill that will last long after the current coronavirus (COVID-19) challenge. By adapting your mindset to accept that virtual working will be the norm for a while, you will find that your behaviour and language around virtual meetings changes too.

2. PLAN WELL

Decide early which meetings to continue planning and which to postpone.

Virtual meetings ARE a different beast - you can't rely purely on what gets you through a face to face meeting, to get the best from them requires some careful thought. The good news however is that what makes a great face to face meeting also makes a great virtual meeting. It just requires some amplification.

3. BE CLEAR ABOUT PURPOSE and OUTCOMES

Your task is to bring people together and harmonise them in support of a project/goal.

To maximise the potential of energy & thinking in for the best value out.

Clarity of purpose, thought about how to get the most from the people/brains involved and a common record of the work done to support genuine understanding, debate and agreement.

4. OUTCOMES and PROCESS

Reduce the number of items on your agenda by half and do each twice as well.

Be clear about what you need to achieve in the meeting, for example, a decision; a plan; a problem solved. Then state the outcome in your meeting invite.

Plan thinking time into virtual meetings – take a break and then reconvene.

Expect and value pauses – they are evidence of new thinking taking place.

Set up mini-groups inside your meeting. You can have multiple conversations taking place at the same time and then come back together as one whole group to share findings.

5. ESTABLISH CLEAR RULES

DO THIS

- Focus on the reason for the conversation
- Behave in a virtual meeting the same way you would face to face
- Be fully present.

STOP THIS

- Blaming technology for poor quality planning
- Dialling in while driving / travelling
- Saying 'I'm going on mute due to back ground noise' and then focusing your attention elsewhere
- Thinking as you can't be seen you can multi-task.

6. MAKE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE – AMPLIFY

Share screens.

Capture on a shared screen insights gleaned and decisions made as you work together.

Put the video on if bandwidth supports it.

Use an iPad or tablet to support.

Provide a template for people to complete and share - either on a shared platform or by circulating photographs.

Send round summaries of agreements as they are reached.

7. EXPECT TECHNOLOGY GLITCHES

Virtual meeting platforms are improving all the time, but they are not infallible yet. Expecting glitches to happen will weirdly make them less irritating.

Agree with all as part of your Meeting Rules, what to do if there's a glitch.

You might consider having tech support within easy reach for your most important meetings.

We offer this advice with absolute commitment to your success and with the invitation for you to flex your virtual muscles and grow stronger, effective meeting habits. Build them and irrespective of circumstance you will get more value from your virtual/face to face meetings.

For those meetings where you need to focus your expertise purely on being part of the conversation in the meeting rather than leading/facilitating it or where the going is likely to get tough – contact us – we will bring our TFP facilitation expertise to you virtually and our Inky Thinking team will create graphics which capture the conversation and provide a live common focal point for every participant irrespective of where they are in the world.

With real (and virtual) commitment to great meeting practice, to your success and that of your business.

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The Facilitation Partnership

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