

Remote Meeting Best Practices



Whether your company was remote before the COVID-19 pandemic took over the world, or moved to remote work afterward, meetings are no doubt part of the process.

To ensure you and your team get the most of each meeting without wasting time and impacting productivity, consider working these best practices into your processes.

Remote meetings and team management are a different ballgame - so with them, comes different rules.

Before the Meeting

Select and Test Your Tools Ahead of Time

There are plenty of collaboration tools you can use to facilitate remote meetings - Zoom, Google Meet/Hangouts, WebEx, GoToMeeting, Join.me, Skype, etc.

No two tools are exactly alike. While there are free options, these often come at the expense of reduced meeting time, a limited number of attendees, etc.

That's why it's important to research meeting tools ahead of time and make sure

you're investing in the one you think will be best for your needs.

Make sure everyone knows how to use the features and is comfortable with the platform before using it for an official meeting.

Using video makes it easier for everyone to feel like they are in the same room, which helps to keep it engaging. But, it's also crucial to have an audio dial-in option.

Video conferencing requires a strong internet connection, which may not always be available.

The audio option ensures everyone can participate, but let everyone know to use video whenever possible, as it is the best substitute for face-to-face communication.

Create a Set of Virtual Meeting Norms - or Rules of Engagement

These can be things like:

- Test technology before the meeting and resolve any technical issues (and include who to go to for help)
- Do not multi-task during the meeting.
- Use the mute button when appropriate, and do your best to find a quiet space to participate.

Whatever meeting norms you set, include them at the top of the meeting and share them with the agenda. For best results, there should be no more than six of them, and you should work with your team to create them.

If you want them to work, everyone has to own them. When properly implemented, they will improve the virtual meeting process and reinforce the behaviors you want.

Have a Plan B

Ideally, you or whoever is hosting the video conference should sign on to the platform at least five minutes early, to set up the virtual meeting in advance, or

fall back to plan B in the event of any technology hiccups.

Whether plan B is to move to a different platform or to postpone the meeting for another time - all team members should be notified ahead of time about what to do should they be unable to connect to the meeting at the scheduled time.

Create a Shared Space

One of the best ways to feel like you're in a face-to-face meeting is to create a shared environment, like an online whiteboard, or make it possible for attendees to communicate via a chat room within the meeting, or from within another channel like Slack or screen sharing.

Knowing they're expected to participate in the shared space will help keep the remote team engaged.

Create and Share the Meeting Agenda Ahead of Time

Remote meetings take time and effort, so to make the most of the time you have available together as a group, it's best to share the agenda ahead of the meeting, with anyone who will participate, so that everyone has adequate time to prepare. Include any action items you must discuss so that everyone is aware of what will be covered.

If you need to tackle something tough with your team, don't be afraid to use a virtual meeting to do it. It may be tempting to wait until everyone can come together in person again, but for many companies with fully remote teams, this isn't an option at all.

Once you and your team are comfortable working in the virtual meeting environment, you can tackle any topic - so long as you schedule for it accordingly.

Keep Presentations As Short as Possible

Long presentations are bad enough in an in-person environment, and even worse in a virtual setting.

Allow the meeting to be a discussion, rather than filled with background

information that could have been presented to attendees ahead of time.

If presenting is necessary, rely on screen-share features to guide the conversation and keep everyone on the same page.

The conversation needs to be the priority so people can look at one another.

Invite Only Those Who Are Necessary

Because technology limits how many people can attend any meeting at any time, and you're likely having to deal with workers who have less than ideal remote environments (ie. background noise, children, pets, etc.) keep the attendees limited to only those who are essential.

Allow others to get information via a recording of the meeting or memos.

Assign a Facilitator

Since it can be harder to manage a virtual meeting than an in-person one, assigning a single person to handle guiding the conversation ensures that other remote workers can focus on the content.

For best results, the facilitator should be someone who is able to answer basic questions about the technology used to host the online meeting.

Provide a Quick Overview of Meeting Etiquette

Remind people that they should mute themselves when they're not speaking because of background noise.

Be aware of body language while on screen. Sit close to the camera so it feels like everyone is in the same room and faces remain visible. Avoid background distractions and side conversations.

Side conversations are like whispering to another person in the meeting room and can be confusing.

Remind your team that written communication like chat and email can be misinterpreted. One person may take something as argumentative, while another person may see it as a discussion.

Keep this in mind and always proceed as if the other person has a positive intent. Jumping to conclusions is never good for the team.

For many companies, the coronavirus has changed the way processes work, including meetings.

During the Meeting

Introduce Everyone

Video cameras won't show every speaker throughout the entire meeting. Some software only displays the icon or photo of the person speaking while they are speaking.

That's why it's a good idea to introduce everyone at the start of the meeting, and encourage them to use a photo of attendees on the wall when video isn't in use.

Why? People are more likely to participate openly when they are aware of who is on the call.

Allow Time at the Start and End of the Meeting for Chit-Chatting

The connection is still crucial for everyone, even in a remote environment.

You don't want to delay the start of a meeting because of chatting, but failing to allow the team some time for small talk can damage morale.

When appropriate, encourage team members to introduce their children and pets.

Remind Everyone Why You're Coming Together and the End Goal

Once the meeting starts, remind everyone of the meeting goal.

This helps ensure all the participants are clear on what they need to achieve at the end, so they can stay on track during the meeting.

Assign Tasks Accordingly

Roles should be split between attendees, just like they would be during in-person meetings.

One person should facilitate the meeting, while another serves as a timekeeper and ensures everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute, and another writes down all the important discussions and decisions, using a shared platform like Google Docs.

Allow Everyone To Identify Themselves

This is crucial if not all the participants are using video during the meeting. Quickly stating who they are before they speak gives all the other attendees a chance to recognize their voice and identify all the speakers.

If everyone is remote working as part of a distributed team who has never met in person, this is especially important.

Ask Everyone To Contribute

Asking others for input helps engagement. It's important that everyone follow basic meeting etiquette rules, though, since only one person can be heard at a time.

This keeps the meeting interactive, without one person taking over.

Call on People To Speak

Go around the table so that everyone has a chance to speak before any final decisions are made.

If your tool includes a "raise a hand" feature, encourage people to use it to indicate when they wish to speak.

Engage

Use ice breaker questions to get people talking. Intrapersonal relationships are essential but become even more important during periods of isolation like the

coronavirus.

Encourage people to brainstorm their ideas as they relate to the task at hand.

Recognize Accomplishments

To foster more of a bonded relationship between all your remote workers, take time to recognize the accomplishments of each and every one of the team members in attendance.

Keep It Simple

Before the meeting, make sure everyone is aware of the objectives, guidelines, and rules.

Take breaks if necessary, (plan for a short break once every hour if the meeting is planned to run longer) and outline the next steps both at the end of the section and at the end of the meeting.

The next steps need to include the expected timeline along with accountabilities.

With the right tools, like Poll Everywhere, you can collect on-demand feedback from attendees on specific topics - in real-time.

To keep it from disrupting the flow of the meeting, you can keep polling open and separate from the video conference.

After the Meeting

Follow Up

Remind all participants about the main points covered in the meeting, and the direction going forward.

This makes the meeting more effective and reinforces the remote meeting's importance to team members.

Get Feedback

Check in with team members after the meeting is over to ask for their thoughts about the entire process. What did they like?

What would they change? What could make things better for them in future video calls?

The most effective remote meetings are those with a clear cut purpose ahead of time, scheduled at an appropriate time for team members living across multiple time zones, and follow a structured workflow.

Remote leadership isn't always easy but with the right approach to meetings, everyone can be productive.

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