13 etiquette tips for video conference calls

by **N.F. Mendoza** in **Mobility** 🔊 on March 23, 2020, 12:58 PM PST

Due to the coronavirus, virtual meetings are now standard for employees working from home. Follow these video conferencing tips on staying connected and professional.

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Video or audio, Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet--being a part of virtual meetings has become the norm (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/downloads-of-zoom-slack-and-microsoft-teams-skyrocket-as-enterprises-move-to-remote-work/), as companies have sent employees to work from home for the foreseeable future (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/10-new-coronavirus-maps-predict-how-fast-hospitals-will-hit-capacity-and-which-places-are-at-highest-risk/), or at least until there's confidence COVID-19 (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-covid-19-is-disrupting-the-enterprise-and-what-you-can-do-about-it/) is under control.

Especially for those more familiar with in-person meetings, remote conference calls (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-hr-can-manage-the-ever-increasing-remote-workforce/) can be a challenge: There are often participants who struggle with the technology or their at-home bandwidth. Once "in" the meeting, people also often talk over each other, which is even more critical not to do, given issues of buffering, delays, and speaker clarity.

SEE: Coronavirus and other IT tools every business needs (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/coronavirus-critical-it-policies-and-tools-every-business-needs/) **(TechRepublic)**

Meetings are a must

"Love them or hate them, meetings are a part of almost every job, whether you're working remotely or working in an office," said Kathy Gardner, senior director of PR & media, FlexJobs.

"In a remote workplace (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-use-remote-collaboration-now-and-after-the-coronavirus-pandemic/), finding daily opportunities to still see your coworkers, helps us stay connected, especially those that you may not work with on a daily basis," said Armen Vartanian, vice president, global workplace services, Okta. "That aspect of the office environment is lost when everyone is remote." Vartanian said he conducts a daily 15-minute meeting to simply stay engaged.

Anyone who has sat through the tedium of daily meetings that involve roll calls, and awkward lulls can appreciate what Robert Love, CTO for Q-CTRL, a facilitator in development of quantum computers, said, "Don't have meetings for meetings' sake, have a facilitator, have an agenda and stick to it."

Top tips for conference call etiquette

FlexJobs' focus is on the flexible work environment (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/the-10-rules-found-in-every-good-remote-work-policy/), and the company recently released a list of the top 13 tips for remote conference etiquette. Other business experts also weigh in, too.

1. Always have an agenda

There's nothing more irritating (and frustrating and not productive) than a meeting in which everyone languidly checks in, and then the person who scheduled the meeting has no plan. Don't schedule a meeting if you don't have an agenda. "Agendas don't have to be long, involved, or even particularly detailed," FlexJob suggested. "A brief outline of what topics the meeting will cover is usually good enough."

By providing staff with an agenda, attendees know what to expect, can guesstimate how long it will run, and, if there is an element of participation, will give them an opportunity to prepare talking points. "If you know you have people coming from other meetings, then maybe start the meeting five minutes after the start time," said James McQuiggan, security awareness advocate, KnowBe4, who added, regarding agendas, "Include it in the meeting notice. Also, have it on a slide that is shared and readily available."

"As a leader on a call, it can be challenging to bring a remote team (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/52-of-employees-is-some-industries-now-work-remotely-due-to-covid-19/) to focus and communicate effectively, so it's important for the leader to assign ownership across the team and help facilitate the conversation amongst the group," Okta's Vartanian said. "Creating hand-offs in the conversation can make sure everyone on the call feels engaged and understands key takeaways, and helps you avoid those awkward transitions or lulls."

SEE: Coronavirus updates: COVID-19-hit Senate back to work on huge stimulus bill (https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-latest-news-deaths-2020-03-23/) **(CBS News)**

2. Report your absence

"Skip the small talk about weather," said Dominik Zane, CEO, Around video-chat software. "Being on time also minimizes the need for everyone else to make small talk while waiting for late joiners."

If you are not going to be at the meeting, or if you're going to be late, tell the person leading the meeting (or a trusted team member) as soon as you know. Call, email, or text. Conference

calls are often held up waiting for specific attendees. Sometimes conference calls are held up because everyone is waiting "a few more minutes."

Being seen on video is an important element of conference call etiquette, "It's important for participants to keep their video on as much as possible, particularly in the current context," said Andrey Khusid, CEO of Miro, a white-boarding platform. "Video adds a human touch to meetings, which can combat isolation and strengthen team relationships. And it can help the meeting facilitator identify whose attention is wandering, so they can bring them back into the conversation."

3. Prioritize updates
Some staff are larger than others, and conference call meeting size has a bit more relevance than in-person meetings. If you're in an office with a tight quartet of people, you're likely to know each other, and what you need to do. Someone will likely keep things "on track," and it's likely to be efficient. However, when you have, for example, more than eight people, it's critical

to "prioritize what you will and won't talk about," FlexJobs said.

Set time constraints and stick to them. This allows each person to talk about what is relevant and can cap the overall length of the meeting.

An important thing to remember, the report noted, is make sure that what's going to be discussed is relevant to at least three people in the meeting. Otherwise, send an email on the topic or conduct a smaller meeting. "Being mindful of time is key to conference call etiquette."

4. Test equipment
Don't wait until a couple minutes before a meeting to sign on.
On cell phones: Make sure you have:

- A strong signal
- No interference

On a computer

- Use a wired connection rather than Wi-Fi
- Make sure the computer camera works (or is uncovered)
- Make sure the speakers work
- Make sure the microphone works

Even if it says you're connected to the platform, make sure you actually are.

Test your video and audio before the meeting starts (hence the tip to sign on early enough to do this).

Allow even more time in case there is something to download beforehand or in case you have an unexpected update.

"Call quality is a theme, and when you're dealing with a 100% remote situation, where all participants are on the call, this is exacerbated," Q-CTRL's Love said. "My number one tip would be to invest in a headset. People have no problem dealing with substandard video, but substandard audio is a deal breaker and can render a call useless."

5. No sneaking out

This is not a third-grade recorder performance, or for some, church. Don't sneak out. In a virtual meeting, there's enough flexibility for you to attend part of it and then jump off. However, it's important you tell your supervisor or the person leading the meeting.

In some platforms, you can just sign off, and no one will know; in others, your face or name disappears from the shared screen. And if your company uses the former, don't cut out just because you can. If you have a conflicting appointment, tell everyone at the start of the meeting or send an email (that you know has been read) ahead of time.

If you have something else scheduled, you're more likely to be called on to share updates and add feedback early on. You don't want to be called on or asked a question and then appear to have suddenly vanished. Transparency, people.

6. Be prepared

It's bad conference etiquette to be called on and be unprepared. It's also a missed opportunity. Just because it's on a platform/phone doesn't mean your meeting prep is any different. Have notes on your phone next to you, and bookmark anything you need for reference. Clear your desktop of unnecessary files.

If it's a check-in or update meeting, discuss your current project and any recent accomplishment (it should go without saying, but don't brag or pat yourself on the back too much). Be clear and concise, and if you're uncomfortable with speaking to a group, practice beforehand. Let attendees know that if they have questions, you'll answer them.

"Be on time!" Q-CTRL's Love said. "Better to be 10 minutes early, than a minute late."

7. Choose a quiet location

It's easy to forget that there is a mic picking up not only your voice, but if you decide to eat/chew something, that sound will come through. If you make a cuppa tea, the sound of your cabinet opening and the dinging of the microwave will be amplified. Wait until the meeting is over. "Ambient noises can come through on your computer microphone, if it's not silenced," KnowB4's McQuiggan said.

And like most things, location, location, location: If you live on a busy street, if your meeting coincides with trash pickup, if you live next to a preschool (or it sounds like it), choose a different room to take the meeting.

"One of the biggest distractions on conference calls come from unmuted attendees," FlexJobs' Gardner said. If your remote office (https://www.techrepublic.com/videos/the-coronavirus-could-make-remote-work-the-norm-what-businesses-need-to-know/) is the local coffee house, consider that it might be too noisy, especially if you'll be competing with the ambient noise when delivering your update. Finally, if there is a mute-mic alternative, choose it, and only unmute when it's your turn to talk.

And who are we kidding? We definitely care about how we look, sheltering at home, to our colleagues. "If possible, sit somewhere with plenty of daylight, Around's Zane said. " We tend to feel more comfortable and look better--especially on an integrated laptop camera--in spaces with lots of natural light."

8. Place pets in another room

A giant perk to working at home (if that's your remote office, and if you're sheltering at home) is having your pet around you. However, if your dog has a tendency to get the zoomies, your cats constantly battle for dominance, or your macaw screeches (and you may be used to it, but to others, it's horrifying): Put them in a different room. Your colleagues do not want to hear that, not only over your voice, but over anyone else's. And be sure your pets are secured away/quiet before you call in to the conference call.

9. Stay on track

Accustomed to constantly checking into social media? Love getting those Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok updates? That all needs to be turned off during the meeting. "Multitasking is rude to the other participants in the meeting, who will be able to sense that you aren't fully engaged," Miro's Khusid said.

It may also be tempting to watch a captioned movie or show during the meeting, but proper etiquette deems you be 100% focused on the call. FlexJobs suggested you stand during the meeting while listening and talking, and even to stretch or do lunges to keep alert before you're asked to speak.

10. Speak up

You may have a great connection, a crystal clear view of participants, and sound like you're in the same room. However, everyone won't have the same connection. Even if you can hear teammates perfectly well, it might not be so in the other direction. Always speak clearly and

loudly (but of course, don't shout), and ask if you can be heard by everyone. This isn't the time to mumble or speak softly. It's a conference call, not an ASMR YouTube video.

11. Say your name

Even if you have a Brady Bunch-esque grid of attendees in front of you, it's hard to keep track of who is saying what (hopefully the meeting leader established a way to avoid the seemingly inevitable over talking).

When you start talking, identify yourself, "This is Penelope, and I have a question," or "Hi, it's Jamison, I'd like to add to that point." FlexJobs said, "That way, your contributions to the conversation is noted, and no one is left wondering who the genius with the awesome comments is."

12. Use the mute button

Again, inevitably, especially those who are wiggly/can't sit still for long, you don't want any scratching or odd sounds coming from you. Even if you're in a quiet location, mute yourself when you know you won't be called on. It's a lot easier to hit "unmute" than be known as the staffer who makes weird noises. An important element of conference call etiquette is not to let subtle distractions derail the person speaking or disrupt the conversation. Definitely turn off notification sounds--there's little more irritating than a constant dinging every time someone from your fantasy football league wants to weigh in on their picks or your worldwide family makes sure you are sheltering well.

13. Silence isn't always golden

Don't forget to unmute yourself when it's your time to talk, or everyone will see your mouth moving, your arms gesticulating but won't hear you. Someone (or all) will let you know, and everyone will laugh.

Keeping in touch while telecommuting

Remember, too--if you're on an audio-only call--that people can't see you, so you can't nod in response or agreement. FlexJobs suggested you narrate what you're doing, so there aren't long stretches of silence while you're searching on your desk for a report, etc.

As of now, no one can predict how long the spectre of the coronavirus (https://www.cbsnews.com/coronavirus/) will require remote work or if it will bring to light the effectiveness of remote work (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/remote-work-especially-in-it-could-

become-a-permanent-trend/).

Remote work (https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-set-up-a-basic-home-workstation-for-remote-employees/) shouldn't isolate, and contact amongst team members is critical. "The daily contact is more important than video," said Barry Po, president, Smart Facilities for mCloud Technologies. "Since our time is spread across many cities globally, we want to make sure everyone feels like they can reach out (virtually) anytime to anyone."

Yet others cite video as esse   ues on a daily basis
maintains the lost personal c   note work, Q-CTRL's Love
said.

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- Coronavirus: More must-read coverage (https://flipboard.com/@techrepublic/coronavirus-what-business-pros-needs-to-know-jurtmat8y) (TechRepublic on Flipboard)

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