Virtual presence: make the most of your technology

Many of the best practices for one-to-one conversations, presentations, and facilitations still apply in a virtual setting; however, some significant differences can influence your presence and how your message is coming across. Here are some thoughts on some best practices you can follow to support your virtual interactions.

On the phone

- Aim for variety in tone, pace, and pitch.
- Sit up straight or stand to ensure you have energy in your voice.
- Select a Passionate Purpose before your call.
- Speak clearly and slowly, and use short "bullet" phrases.
- Pause and breathe rather than using filler words that undermine your credibility.
- Allow silence—sometimes people just need to digest information or are waiting to hear after a delay in the audio.
- Shut down other applications to resist the temptation to multitask. You would do this for an in-person meeting, so do the same virtually to elevate your presence. People can tell.

On webcam

- Look directly into the webcam from time to time to give your audience the experience of eye contact.
- Bring expressiveness to your face to show emotion.
- Use gestures and movements naturally, but aim to keep big or quick movements to a minimum.
- Be mindful of what you have going on in the background that could distract your audience or send an unintended, unprofessional message.

Using a web conferencing platform

- Use a webcam for yourself and other attendees whenever possible—this dramatically raises the bar on interaction, heightens engagement, and limits multitasking.
- Engage your audience frequently rather than just downloading information and rushing through a shared slide deck.
- Use polling, chat, and status icon features when available.
- Streamline slides to have limited words so that people are listening rather than reading—you can send a follow-up email/document with more details afterwards.
- Expect technological breakdowns and have a backup plan. A good strategy is to have the video/screen sharing separated from the audio so that if one fails, you can still connect with your audience. Most importantly, breathe, relax, and put the other virtual attendees at ease as you work out a solution.
- For big webinars, meetings, or presentations, have a "host" or a "producer" working with you in the background to manage the technology so that you can focus on being present and connected with the attendees.

Tips for specific interactions

Virtual one-on-one conversations

- Use a webcam whenever possible. You will get a lot more information and can make a more personal connection.
- Take some time to build the relationship and connect on a personal level before diving into business.
- Build relationship by listening for and reflecting back the strengths and values you hear.

Virtual presentations/webinars

- Use fun polling questions at beginning to create a connection with the audience.
- Frequently check in with the audience to determine if your message is landing (as you may not be able to see them) and to ensure that your audience isn't tempted to multitask.
- Use metaphor to help people visualize concepts without the aid of actual visuals.
- Have some prepared questions to answer in a Q&A session if you don't get questions right away from your audience.

Virtual meetings

- Call on people by name and state your name when speaking up.
- Reflect back questions or statements from others to ensure that you (and others) accurately hear what was said.
- Set yourself up for success with the following structure for opening your meeting: 1) Welcome and introduce attendees, 2) Goals, 3) Agenda, 4) Set expectations for participation, 5) Check for understanding, and 6) Check-in.
- Aim to keep regular meetings small if you want lively engagement.
- If you have low engagement or people aren't speaking up, try priming them before the call to ask one or two questions and coach them on their speaking points.
- If you have a meeting with many people together in person and a few people connecting virtually, appoint one of the in-person members to advocate for the virtual attendees and make sure their voices are included.
- When you are attending a virtual meeting and you need something repeated, ask—chances are you are not the only one.

Considerations for diverse, global audiences

Virtual technology makes it much easier to connect with people all over the world. This is a wonderful opportunity for organizations. However, to effectively lead and participate in these interactions, it is useful to remember the following:

- Be sensitive to time zones when scheduling.
- Speak in clear, short sentences for those who don't share your native language.
- If the conversation is not in your native language, don't let this discourage you from participating. Focus on your Passionate Purpose rather than getting the words right—this is what people care about.
- Balance different norms of conversation. Do some people wait to be called on out of respect? Do other people see interruption as a natural part of lively discourse?