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How to... run productive virtual meetings.

10 top tips.

Love them or hate them, for many of us the online virtual meeting is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

This checklist outlines 10 practical tips that can help you run your virtual meetings successfully.

10 top tips for productive virtual meetings

1. Agree ground rules and etiquettes with your colleagues.	These can include things like punctuality and minimising distractions. Avoid scheduling 1 hour, on the hour, back to back meetings. Try 45 minute slots instead. And make sure you always role model these behaviours yourself.
2. Plan and share your agenda, structure and any pre-reading in advance.	This should be a standard for any type of meeting, to ensure best use of time and help people organise themselves beforehand. (This is especially helpful for introverts who often prefer to have time to reflect and compose their thoughts internally before sharing).
3. Run an informal ‘check in’ before the formal meeting begins.	Before you launch into the task-focused, transactional aims of the meeting, spend a quality 5-10 minutes asking colleagues how they are feeling, and really listen to the answers. Some teams find it useful to use the question – “On a scale of 1 - 10, how are you doing today?”
4. Encourage positivity - ask each person to share a daily / weekly ‘what went well’.	Research shows that people will naturally focus on and remember negative events more readily than positive events, so encourage positive communication whenever you can.
5. Avoid interruptions.	Video conferencing can be challenging enough without people interrupting or talking over others. Ask people to use the Chat function, or just raise a hand, to lodge that they’d like to speak next. (This can be difficult for extroverts who are used to thinking out loud and building on the ideas of others, so patience and practice may be needed!)
6. Direct your comments and questions to a single person at a time.	Reduce unwanted domination and the classic “you go...no, you go...” exchanges by using names when you ask a question. You could also consider asking a different team member to act as a facilitator in each meeting to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to have their say.
7. Use humour and informality whenever possible.	Our sense of belonging to a tribe is vital for wellbeing, so try to emphasise the human touch to maintain that social connection through the screen. Pets, children and minor mishaps are great for this! And there is evidence to suggest that humour patterns in team interactions are positively related to communication, team performance and solution-finding. Win-win!
8. Allow team members to connect without video at times.	Research has shown that video conferencing is very tiring. It increases our ‘emotional load’ because not only are we interpreting the behaviours of others, we are also monitoring and adapting our own online presence. Connecting without video (where appropriate) will ease the cognitive burden and help with meeting stamina overall.
9. Only use mute function if essential.	Using mute will minimize noise, especially in large meetings. However, people are far more likely to disengage and start multi-tasking when on mute, so agree with your team that they should use it only when necessary.
10. Ask for feedback.	Don’t assume you’ve got all the answers! Virtual meetings are new for lots of people, and the situation is constantly evolving. Your colleagues will have good ideas on how to continually improve things. So ask them for feedback regularly, and keep questioning the status quo.