

OPTIMIZING YOUR WORK IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

In the new virtual world, we cannot rely on traditional ways of working with others. From running and participating in meetings, to decision-making processes, to simply establishing relationships with our colleagues, we need to be deliberate, authentic, and creative in our interactions.



Running Effective Virtual Meetings

- **Create a meeting plan** that specifies objectives, assumptions, roles, required pre-work, and ground rules. Distribute it before the meeting so everyone is prepared to participate.
- Keep meetings short to **maintain engagement and focus**. Divide long meetings into more manageable chunks.
- **Be realistic about what can be achieved in the time available**. Reduce the meeting scope as necessary to fit the scheduled time.
- **Establish clear roles**, including facilitator (or chair), timekeeper and scribe (to record action points and decisions).
- Start meetings with an informal check-in or ice-breaker before getting down to business. This can **foster team connectedness and calibrate how participants are doing**. If you find that one person is dominating the conversation, thank them for their input and state that you would like to hear from other participants.



Virtual Decision-Making

- Agree to **document decisions and determine how follow up will occur** at the start of your meeting to increase the likelihood of action being taken and completed.
- **Consider using an anonymous electronic tool to brainstorm ideas**, particularly when discussing sensitive topics.
- Openly discuss the pros and cons of each idea presented and whether the negatives can be addressed. **Understand team members' concerns** to determine level of support for moving forward.
- **Search for consensus**. Silence does not imply consent with the issue at hand. When critical issues are discussed, **be sure that all opinions are heard**.
- If you are trying to come to a decision with a larger group, or without forcing people to outwardly share their views, consider using an online polling tool during your meeting.
- **Review action items at the conclusion** to ensure everyone is clear on follow-up actions, ownership, and timelines.

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Fostering Virtual Relationships

- **Build empathy** with colleagues by taking the time to get to know one another.
- **Create space for impromptu conversations** through transparency. Consider making it team policy to update your status on your messaging tool so that colleagues know if you are actually available to chat, or instead are in “do not disturb” mode or in a meeting.
- **Be aware of cultural differences and differences in time zones** to level the playing field in meetings.
- Send a morning message, Slack, IM, or text to **create virtual “water cooler” moments** and trigger conversations that normally occur organically for a colocated team.
- **Schedule brief 1:1 check-ins with colleagues**, especially if you notice changes in their demeanor or a loss in productivity.
- **Verbalize your support and caring for your colleagues.** Not everyone is experiencing this new virtual environment in the same way and some may be struggling.



Developing Virtual Influence

- **Create emotional connections with colleagues** that help them feel supported. Especially in times of crisis when anxiety is high, others must feel that you “see” them as people.
- **Establish a video-first culture** to aid in building trust and influence. Video provides the context needed to strengthen relationships and communication.
- Try to **understand others’ perspectives and jobs**. Ask yourself, what are their priorities? How can I make their jobs easier?
- **Set up a weekly call or email summary** for your boss to keep them in the loop on your activities and priorities. Include your plans for the following week. **Connect your efforts to the broader business objectives.**

