

# Your Virtual Meetings Are Driving People Nuts. Here Are 3 Ways to Fix Them--Now

During virtual meetings, both the facilitators and the participants miss the benefit of body language and vocal cues, making it hard to "read the room" or notice when someone has checked out, gotten frustrated, is confused, or even excited. Finally, no matter how many times you've used the technology, participants can experience anxiety about whether the tools will work exactly when and how they need them to - and meeting organizers and facilitators fear the same.

With all of these challenges in mind, here are three strategies you can use to turn your virtual meetings from a block of time for your team to catch up on their "real work" to an opportunity for participants to feel engaged, involved, connected and committed.

## 1. Engage your participants before the meeting starts.

The work of the meeting can (and often should) start well in advance of the time set aside for the actual online gathering. Get people educated, motivated, prepared and excited by:

- sending out a survey in advance to gather insight, opinions and information
- calling people personally to let them know you're looking forward to what they uniquely will contribute to/take away from the meeting
- disseminating an article, podcast or video related to the topic of the meeting
- giving participants an assignment
- assigning participants an "accountability buddy" that they should connect with after the meeting to discuss key themes and get the work done
- setting up an online portal or intranet site where they can share questions, comments, resources and progress on goals before or after the meeting

## 2. Establish and enforce Operating Principles.

People don't always know how to behave in an in-person meeting, let alone in an online meeting. Create, share, discuss and get agreement on a few simple Operating Principles that articulate shared expectations for how you want your participants to show up and contribute to the conversation. A few simple ones may include:

- Be fully present for this meeting (*don't be doing other things*)
- Say it in the meeting (*not afterwards in the break room or parking lot*)
- Give new voices an opportunity to be heard (*don't hog the conversation*)
- Disagree without being disagreeable (*offer a different perspective without being combative*)
- Take risks (*speak up, even if it feels uncomfortable*)

### **3. Plan multiple engagements.**

One of the primary reasons why people check out or multitask during online meetings is because they're not being asked to contribute their ideas or opinions. Here are some ways to shift from a one-sided lecture to an interactive session:

- Ask participants a question that they can answer over voice (for a small meeting) or chat (for a larger meeting).
- Invite attendees to plan how they will apply what you've discussed.
- Give a quick pop quiz to test recall on earlier topics you've covered if your meeting is an hour or longer.
- Create a poll to gather a visual snapshot of what your participants are doing, thinking, are challenged by or are celebrating.
- Ask people to "fill in the blanks" in the meeting notes you sent in advance, so that they need to pay attention during the meeting to get the answers.
- Create breakout rooms so that people can work in pairs, triads or small groups for a brief period of time, and then return to the meeting to share their work.
- Play a video clip during the meeting.
- Give other meeting participants the opportunity to lead different sections of the session.
- Invite people to report back on something they tried and/or accomplished since the last meeting.

If you're going to hold a meeting - whether in person, online, or a combination of both - make sure that your participants have an opportunity not only to get something out of it, but to put something into it as well.