Covid-19 Pivot: Going Virtual

Virtual meetings require specific skills, structures and processes. They’re also an opportunity to bring impact & focus.

Some Guidelines to Get the Most out of Working Together Virtually
Successfully Collaborate Remotely

#1 STAY MOTIVATED & PRODUCTIVE WITH CYBER HUGS

In times of uncertainty and fear, leaders have 2 priorities for their teams: (1) keep them safe (2) keep them connected. These are the pre-requisites for maintaining motivation and productivity.

How?

- Stay connected with daily check-ins. Divide into small groups for this: 2-4 people max to ensure quality time for all.
- Use video: seeing each other makes us feel more connected.
- Be supportive, but don’t coddle: We usually over- or under-estimate problems, so keep each other realistic.
- Help people avoid negative media. Focus on wins, opportunities and systems to get through it together.

#2 VIRTUAL MEETING SIZE & DURATION

Virtual meetings work when you keep them concise and focused. Quality decreases as size increases. Where large numbers of participants are a necessity, use webinar format.

How?

- Only hold a meeting to answer questions you can’t answer without it.
- Focus on 1 specific outcome (separate short meetings are better than 1 long one)
- Only include people who absolutely have to be there. Update others via email or a sharing platform.
- Keep it short - 15-30 min.
- Keep it small: aim for under 8 people
- For larger teams, divide into outcome focused sub-groups
- To avoid non-essential members feeling excluded, give them the option to participate in future meetings if they want

#3 VIRTUAL AGENDA: ASK QUESTIONS – GET ANSWERS

Clarity is always important, but in times of uncertainty it’s critical. Use screen-share so everyone can see the agenda and capture decisions in real-time to ensure everyone’s on the same page.

How?

- State each agenda item as a question and invite only those who can answer it – or are directly impacted by the answer.
- Plan ahead: who should speak? What questions do they need answers to? From whom?
- Indicate specifically what each person will contribute
- To handle virtual dynamics, allow 20% more time than for in-person meetings
- A common virtual meeting problem is maintaining engagement: try allocating roles (Chair, Time-keeper, Note-Taker…)
- At the end of each question, capture who is responsible to do what (actions), by when

OPERATING RULES

Agreeing principles up-front is critical to success.

Co-create these together: people are more likely to implement decisions they’ve helped create.

10 questions will get you started:

1. What tech will we use? (video meetings are 50% more effective than audio: Zoom has a low learning threshold for beginners)
2. Who do we really need in the meeting?
3. What sub-groups will work on specific outcomes?
4. What work can be done independently, in small sub-groups, or both?
5. Can we set up a central place to post, access and comment on work? (eg. Trello, Monday.com, Notion)
6. What preparation is needed before each meeting?
7. How many meetings do we need, and how often?
8. What are the roles & responsibilities of each person?
9. How will we capture and share decisions?
10. What will be our agreed Virtual Meeting Etiquette?
#4 AGREE VIRTUAL MEETING ETIQUETTE

Leading virtual meetings requires a firmer approach than in in-person meetings. Give clear instructions on how you’ll host the meeting and to ensure things go smoothly, get agreement on virtual Meeting Etiquette up-front

- Agree to start 10 min early to re-connect and check technology.
- Turn video ON: this keeps things human, captures non-verbal cues and limits the temptation to multi-task.
- Everyone introduces themselves before each intervention “Jack here, I think…”
- Decide on a mechanism for making interventions - raised hand? Messenger app?
- Silence isn’t the same as agreement. Use voting apps and agree that everyone has to express concerns/disagreement during the meeting
- Leader gives clear instructions to include everyone and prevent talking-over each other: Avoid asking “would anyone like to comment?” and instead say “I’m going to ask each of you by name for input” (keep a tally so you know who’s contributed).
- Ask for agreement on equal share of talk-time and what to do if someone dominates.
- Cut out status reports: Instead send out ½ page updates on key agenda items, reserving the meeting only for remaining questions
- Everyone shares responsibility for meeting success: plan 5 min at the end to answer 2 questions: (1) What went well about the meeting? (2) How can we improve it next time?

#5 VIRTUAL MEETING MYTHS

- **Less productive?** Well-structured virtual meetings with strong team etiquette are more productive because we’re forced to be clear and focused.
- **Can’t innovate?** Several short virtual meetings on a topic (rather than 1 long one) can increase innovation because of time between meetings for considered thought and follow-up.
- **Less Inclusive?** Actually, it’s the opposite. The use of virtual meeting tools like polls, messaging and turn-taking means the silent participants have a voice
- **Lose connection & company culture?** Video (not audio), regular check-ins, and co-created rules improve connections because everyone shares responsibility for success.
- **Technophobic?** Becoming experts in the virtual technology you use is important. Invest in remote learning and technical support. Encourage your people to play with the technology. Start with the basics to get familiar and build confidence. Most virtual software providers are offering free on-line learning to support people during this disruptive time.

Further resources:
- Virtual Teams for Dummies
- Resources for business teams coping with Covid-19
- The Surprising Science of Meetings
- www.business4good.eu

We can work with you to co-create and implement a customised action plan to close the gap between meeting potential and meeting results in your organisation. To find out how, please contact Dr Madeleine de Hauke, the Meetings Doctor at m.dehauke@business4good.eu or +32(0)497.50.30.23. www.business4good.eu