

Executive Presence on Video Conferencing Interactions

Adapted by Marsha Clark & Associates, May 2020

I have heard many laments of, “I am ‘Zoomed’ out.” We are currently in a time when working from home also includes many video meetings. Our inability to go into our typical workspace offices has been replaced with portrait frames on a screen. For many, this is our first experience in using video conferencing tools. We enjoy seeing others’ home workspaces and getting to know children and animals as they wander into the frames. We often smile and appreciate that others are experiencing similar realities of juggling work, family, school, and with little time for self-care. In the midst of this current reality, many of my clients have asked for practical tips on how to maintain an executive presence during these video conferencing interactions. I offer the following in hopes that it helps eliminate some of the wondering and the worrying. Choose what works for you and your work environment. These are uncertain times and no one way works for everyone.

Ideal Setting:

I have heard stories from clients that home workspace might be a closet, a patio, a dining room table, or a home office. Here are some tips to select the best location and aesthetics for your video conferencing interactions.

1. Find the most flattering lighting:

- Diffused, soft, natural light
- Not full sunlight
- Walk around your house with your camera facing you – beware shadows and overhead lights
- You might consider a ring lamp in front of you for supplemental lighting

2. Find your most flattering camera angle:

- Angle from below is often the worst
- Slightly higher is better – consider elevating your laptop slightly above eye level and at arm’s length

3. Keep distractions to a minimum:

- Background Matters: If possible, select a neutral, non-cluttered background so that people can easily focus on you and what you have to say. Strive for a pleasant, clean, organized background.
- Wardrobe Matters:
 - ✓ Dress business appropriate for your business culture. You want to avoid wrinkled or stained clothes or looking like you just rolled out of bed. This sounds obvious, and....
 - ✓ Put a little effort into hair and make-up – keep your look consistent with how you would look going into the office.
 - ✓ If your background is light, wear something dark. If it is dark, wear whites and brighter colors. You want to avoid blending into the background.
 - ✓ Use colors and patterns effectively. Too much of a strong pattern can diminish your presence on camera. Smaller patterns used as an accent with solid colored clothing are typically best. The camera loves blues, greens, and also pinks, reds, purples and browns.
 - ✓ Avoid over-sized earrings or bracelets that make noise or move around a lot when you speak.
- Minimize playing with your hair and face.
- Minimize noise from family or pets.
- If your team will be on the call, discuss wardrobe as part of your prep.

Technology Preparation:

I have been on many calls where I can barely see people because their lighting is so dark or I can't hear them because they are struggling with the Mute/Un-Mute capabilities. We're all learning new technology to become proficient. It's quickly becoming a fundamental skill.

1. Focus on your camera:

- Be sure to place the camera at eye level so that you are centered on the screen during the call and easy to see. You want to look into the camera when you are speaking and at the face of the other person when they're speaking.
- Although many people use headsets and earbuds during their calls, it generally reduces the effect of a more personal connection. Your decision to use or not use headsets or earbuds may be situationally considered.

2. Frame yourself wisely: The farther away or more obscured you appear, the less engaging you will be. In a video conference, your head and the top of your shoulders should dominate the screen.

3. Test your microphone before you video call, especially if it's an important meeting.

4. Learn how to use the Mute/Un-Mute capabilities.

5. Be present and mindful:

- It's easy to forget you're being watched. You may be tempted to check your email or do other tasks. Multi-tasking can be a negative because you don't want to be unprepared if asked a question.
- Even if you don't need to be fully engaged in the meeting, your professional reputation can suffer if it looks like you're not paying attention. So close other windows, turn your phone upside down, and remember that you're always 'on camera.'
- Because we're less aware of social cues in a virtual meeting, it is also important to be mindful of how long and how often you speak, if you interrupt other people, and if you make a comment that might offend someone present but out of sight. Consider yourself 'at work' and behave accordingly.

6. Use the Chat Window as your partner:

- When you refer to an article or shared document, link to it in the chat.
- If you run the meeting, put a link to the agenda in the chat.
- When others are speaking, respond with questions or support in the chat.
- The chat window is a unique opportunity in virtual meetings to elevate your presence, add dimensions to your ideas, and demonstrate that you're fully present.

7. Other considerations:

- If you're in a group call without video, introduce yourself before you talk.

Sources:

- Hot and Flashy YouTube: *"How to Look Good on Video Calls"*
- Mary Lou Andre, Bates-communication.com: *"Dressing from the Waist Up: Four Easy Ways to Master Executive Presence on Video Calls"*
- Bryan Lovgren, Co-Founder of TrustaFact: *"Working Remote? These are the Biggest Dos and Don'ts of Video Conferencing"*
- Joel Schwartzberg, Executive Communications and Professional Presentation Coach, Author of *"Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter"*