

# What Leaders Need Now

Helping leaders optimize business and life!

## Making Your Virtual Meetings Engaging

*We've had a question about how to keep people engaged in virtual meetings. To be fair, most organizations weren't doing a great job with meeting management prior to virtual meetings. Most of what we will share here are best practices for meetings in general – and we encourage you to make them part of your best practices. For virtual meetings, they are critical.*

### Planning and Collaboration

Have an agenda and send it out ahead of time. Establish a timekeeper and a note taker. The timekeeper will ensure everyone stays on track with the agenda. The note taker will be responsible for sending out the notes to all attendees. If you don't have a dedicated assistant for these responsibilities, it's a good idea to get volunteers and rotate these roles.

### Set a Dynamic Tone

As the facilitator, you'll need to be dynamic/more energetic to be more engaging, especially in virtual meetings. One thing to do is look at the camera when speaking. This seems odd, but the participants see you looking into their eyes instead of at the screen. This is not the time for a quiet voice – use a strong voice. Speak a little louder than you normally would. Finally elevate your energy as much as you comfortably can.

### Be Present

Encourage – or even require – people to be on video. Ask people to turn off notifications and email for the duration of the meeting. Turn on “do not disturb” for phone calls. This all reduces the chance that they will multi-task. Ask people to mute themselves so background noises aren't distracting to others.

### Start with an Ice Breaker

This depends on the number of people in your meeting. Here are a couple of ideas. You can search the internet for additional ones.

- Have everyone do a quick check-in: one word to describe how they are doing.
- Name one thing you did this week (or weekend if it's a Monday) that you are proud of.
- If software allows, create a poll and have participants respond to the poll question.
- Ask a question and have people answer in the chat. This can be silly (tell us something your child, partner or pet has done recently but call them your coworker) or serious (what is one thing we need to do better as well operate as a virtual team?).

### Restate the Objective

Remind people of the goal for the meeting.

### Breakout

Give people something to do, if possible. It's great if you can get them in small groups through virtual breakout rooms to brainstorm or work through a problem.

### Ask More Questions

Ask questions to get people involved. Also, use some questions to get a reaction from everyone if there is video. Ex: by show of hands, how many of you can hear me ok? Give me a thumbs up, thumbs down or thumbs sideways to let me know how you are doing. Then check in on a couple of people. For the thumbs up, what are some things

that are helping you or making this a “thumbs up” time? For the thumbs down, what’s going on? Where do you need help? Etc.

## Engage Individuals

Call on people randomly. It’s essential to let them know you’ll be doing this. I’m not typically a fan of this, but in large meetings, it does keep people more alert.

## Start and End On Time – or Early

With the number of meetings we are attending, starting and ending on time shows you have respect for people’s schedules. We actually recommend ending a couple of minutes early if you can. Especially when they are sitting in front of a computer for video calls, having a break to grab some water, use the restroom or stretch legs can be highly beneficial.

## Special Considerations

During times of crisis, such as Covid19, additional measures may need to be taken. Some examples include:

- Relax the dress code for calls and/or encourage a themed meeting (costumes, a specific color, wear your favorite hat or cap, etc.)
- If people are concerned about everyone seeing their living space, there are often virtual backgrounds offered by Zoom and other providers. (In Zoom, at the bottom of the screen, click on the ^ beside “Start/Stop Video” and select “virtual background.”)
- Encourage connections with pets, children, partners and spouses. This can be done through virtual happy hours, story time with children, meet my pet, etc. Please do be mindful of your single people who are living alone—DON’T DO THIS ACTIVITY if someone on your team lives alone. It can get very lonely and seeing everyone else’s families can expand that feeling.

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[info@whatleadersneednow.com](mailto:info@whatleadersneednow.com)  
[www.whatleadersneednow.com](http://www.whatleadersneednow.com)



**Andrea Chilcote**  
President  
Morningstar Ventures

[Contact Andrea](#)

[Visit Morningstar Ventures](#)



**Sheppard Lake**  
President  
Sheppard Lake Coaching

[Contact Sheppard](#)

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**Laura Roccaforte**  
President & CEO  
The Learning Exchange

[Contact Laura](#)

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