**THINK DIFFERENT**

**MAXIMIZING VIRTUAL GATHERINGS**

Working, playing, or simply being in virtual space need not be too different from “live” space, only with a different set of tools! Think about how you would create connection in live space and then just think different.

**AHEAD OF TIME**

* Always put the video conference link in calendar invites so there is no scrambling right before the meeting.
* Even if some members are in the same physical space, all **MUST** have their own private screen.
* Assign a "technology expert" to be responsible for understanding the technology chosen for the meetings and dealing with any issues or troubleshooting during the gathering.
* Communicate that all members are expected to maintain a focused, safe, and confidential environment during the meeting. **No public spaces. No driving.** **No additional screens or devices.**

**OPENING THE SPACE**

* Break from “Real World.” Get fully present. Create a safe environment.
* Set the **PACE**…
  + **P**urpose of the group: Who are we? Why do we gather?
  + **A**genda: What are we going to do today?
  + **C**onduct: How do we want to roll together? What is our Confidentiality Agreement?
  + **E**xpectations: What are our desired outcomes for today?
* Check In: Everyone speaks or responds in some way. How are we showing up today?

**MAXIMIZING THE SPACE**

* Ensure everyone is engaged. Include a tangible response no less than every 5-10 minutes.
* 10-minute break every 50 minutes. Move away from the screen. Encourage sunlight and fresh air.
* Allow silence. This isn’t a radio show.
* Use the technology well. Practice beforehand. Mix it up.
* Figure out your “Who is Next?”

**CLOSING THE SPACE**

* End on a positive note.
* Ensure the air is clear. “Did anything happen today that wants to be cleared?”
* Integrate back to the **REAL** world:
  + **R**eflect on what worked and what could have been better.
  + **E**xpress appreciation to an individual or the group as a whole.
  + **A**ction Steps to be taken or review of **A**greements made.
  + **L**earnings to be integrated

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Check out: “[***Nine Friends:  Maximizing Your Forum***](https://www.amazon.com/Nine-Friends-Maximizing-Your-Forum/dp/0557344263)” and

“[***Waking Up:  8 Questions That Will Shift Your Life (or Help You Do Nothing)”***](https://www.amazon.com/Waking-Up-Questions-Shift-Nothing/dp/0359829643/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Vince+Corsaro&qid=1568308645&s=gateway&sr=8-1)

**IDEAS FOR OPENING THE SPACE**

**Initial Openings**

* “Take three deep full breaths. Exhale forcefully. Close your eyes for a moment and allow your breathing to find a nice gentle rhythm. Allow your mind to fall silent. And, breathe… …. …. … take one more deep breath, let your chin drop to your chest and eyes open gently. Scan the screen of faces and greet one another with your smile.”
* “Tap gently on the side of your head and then the top and then all around. Tap gently on your breast bone and then across the soft spot below your collar bone. Place your left hand on your right shoulder and right hand on your left shoulder. Give yourself a hug and then gently run your hands down the opposite arm to “brush off” anything you want to release in this moment.”
* Play a meaningful song (or a part of a song) with good lyrics. Allow everyone to be silent and take it in.
* Read a poem or story. Allow silence. Take three breaths.

**PACE/Norms Reminder**

* “As a group of peers, our desired outcomes today are to connect to our deeper selves and show up authentically for one another.”
* “Please remember to keep your other electronics and screens off and that all of our forum protocols are in place here today. Confidentiality means that you will only share what you have learned for you and not about anyone else. Please listen deeply, accept one another without judgment, ask questions from a place of curiosity, and share from experience as opposed to giving advice. Please also respect our time constraints and do your best to remain fully present while we are together. Okay?”

**Quick Check-In**

* Give everyone a one-minute turn to intro the group to their space. Invite them to move their camera around. Show the group their dog. The view. What they are looking at.
* Simply ask, “What are you looking at right now?” or “What is capturing your attention?” Or, “What might distract you while we are gathering?”
* Post three juicy adjectives that describe you today in the Chat thread.
* Postone word for each that describes you Mentally, Physically, Socially, and Spiritually.
* Draw the four quadrants and four check-in words on a sheet of paper and share on camera.
* Invite everyone to “Rename” themselves on screen by adding their childhood nickname, the city where they were born, their favorite band/artist when they graduated from high school, one word to describe their intention today, or the primary emotion they are feeling right now.
* Invite everyone (do this ahead of time so the pictures are already loaded) to share one to three images in the virtual background of a meaningful picture from their life.
* Invite everyone to give a 1-2 minute status report of their current situation at work, home, and personal life. No feedback or questions.

**IDEAS FOR MAXIMIZING THE SPACE**

**Who is Next?** Decide how you will decide who is next-up in every conversation.

* Raise your hand so it is visible on the screen. Display the “Hand Up” icon. Draw a picture of a hand and hold it up so that it is visible on the screen.
* Take yourself off mute to let the moderator know you want to speak. Wait to be called.
* Decide that only the moderator controls the “mute” and “unmute” function.
* Put a list of all attendees in chat. Ask members to always follow the same order.
* Draw a picture of a table and place all the names around the table. Show it to the group (screen share or just hold it in front of camera). Everyone now knows who is on their left and right. You can now “go around the circle” in either direction.
* The current speaker selects the next speaker. “Toss the ball.”

**Listen Well:** Think about how to maximize engagement throughout the meeting or conversation. Think about how you will reflect or notice what has been shared.

* Set a ground rule that before adding to a conversation, the speaker must reflect/show understanding of what the last person said and then, “Did I get that right?”
* After a member has shared a personal update, invite the member to call on two or three other members randomly and ask (moderator picks the one question):
  + “What is a good curious question I might want to ask myself?” or ,
  + “What were the key emotions or keywords that you heard in my update?” or,
  + “What do you notice about me today?”
* After an individual update, give one minute for everyone to provide an “I notice” or good question in chat.

**Everyone Explores Something**

* Invite each member to post the headline of an important issue or question to be explored in chat.
* Use the breakout function to pair up. One member unpacks their issue and the listening member reflects, checks for accuracy, poses good questions. Come back to the main room and share the headline and the resolution or action. (See “Unpacking Anything” at [www.vincecorsaro.com](http://www.vincecorsaro.com)).
* As a total group or in a four-person breakout room. Each member takes a turn. 2-3 minutes to unpack their headline issue. 3-5 minutes for the group to share openly their observations, ideas, or questions with the presenting member silent. 2 minutes for the presenter to share learnings and takeaways.

**Efficient Responses.** Decide how to get responses to simple questions without coming off mute or speaking.

* Use markers to write simple responses on a sheet of paper and hold up to their screen.
* Use “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” for “**Yes**” and “**No.**” (Zoom has a Thumbs Up Icon).
* Use the polling function.

**Breaks.**

* “Take the next ten minutes to practice ***Radical Self-Care***. You know what is right for you.”
* “Let’s challenge ourselves to relax our minds, move our bodies, and restore ourselves in the next ten minutes. No screens.”
* Upon returning, 10-second share (or post in chat) how you spent the break.

**Collaborate.**

* Use the Whiteboard or Chat function to capture lists. Be sure to save if appropriate.
* Use Google Docs, Mural, or similar sharing space, and invite all members to share and comment at the same time.
* Consider silencing conversation while reviewing and commenting in the document.

**IDEAS FOR CLOSING THE SPACE**

**Business Items**

* Use the polling functions, Doodle, or similar tools to clear calendar items.
* Share screen briefly with important information, bullet points, reminders.

**Return To The REAL World**

* **R**eflect.
  + “What worked well today and what could have been better?”
  + “What was your most valuable takeaway from today’s meeting?”
* **E**xpress appreciation
  + “Give an appreciation to the person on your right.”
  + “Share something you learned from someone else today.”
  + “What are you appreciating about this group?”
* **A**ction Steps to be taken or review of **A**greements made.
  + “What are the agreements we have made today?” Post on a Whiteboard.
  + “What will you do or do differently as a result of today’s gathering?”
  + “What is the one question you are going to ponder on?”
* **L**earnings to be integrated
  + “What is something you learned or were reminded of today?”
  + “What is a conversation you will have with someone after this gathering?”
  + “What is the one word you’d like to carry back into your real world today?”