

The Art of Video Conferencing – Lights, Camera, Action

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Crisis also plays the role of an accelerator. Look at the World wars. The technological and medical advances were the silver lining in an otherwise shameful affair. COVID19 is another such event. While results are eagerly awaited, nobody can deny the accelerated R&D in the medical field. There will be long play political, geo-political and economic changes too. One big change is “Go Digital”. Earlier viewed as a fad or a possibility, it is now deeply embedded. One piece of this digital movement are the ‘e-meetings’, ‘talks’, ‘interactions’ etc. via Video Conferencing (VC). As much loved as maligned, it is the center stage of our lives today. Though we are familiar with the software, be it Team, Zoom, Hangout or such, we are still tardy users. We have all experienced guests logging in late, someone not switching on the camera or constant lament of “can you hear me/ can you see my slide”.

The Evolution of VC

Meetings will become increasingly virtual, virus or not. Those who don't learn to leverage this new reality will be at a disadvantage. You can tell the experience people have with virtual meetings by how they manage sound and where their eyes are on the screen. Becoming adept at remote meetings is an entirely new form of communication. It's hard to do it well. It takes focused effort and real practice, like learning a new language. And learn we must for we need to bring élan in our e-meetings.

Getting Camera Savvy

This is the big one. Ensure you have a clean, quiet and undisturbed room. If you wish, use a customized virtual background. Most critical is projecting yourself. Keep the camera on eye level. You may need to place a base under your laptop or appropriately position your

mobile phone. The ideal image is upward of your chest with not too much empty space above your head, and you looking straight into the camera, which in the e-world is equivalent of making eye contact. And yes, lighting is important - best when coming from the side. Worst is when the person has light behind. All others see is your silhouette.

First Impressions are the Last Impressions

Yes, the boring old idiom still hold true. So, be on time, dress appropriately and send introductory mail along with agenda. It would be wise to test run the technology with team members as also define roleplay. It would be also advisable to check battery levels of your device as well as having a backup for your broadband connection say by plugging that to your backup electric supply points. Sudden cut offs can break that clinching moment. For important meetings I shift to a hotspot link on my phone.

Have clear opening remarks, ideally post a bit of an informal start. Introduce your team and praise them well, as equally your leadership vision. Highlight any part of technology usage you wish viz. raising e-hands, etc. Thereafter, put up a clear agenda.

You are LIVE now

To minimise background noise, be on mute when not talking. Do not believe you turn invisible while you check mails or side glance at the mobile. On VC these get highlighted and you may appear non-involved. You can't be sneaky with the camera on! Taking notes is expected, as is sending minutes and action points later.

The best guiding principle is imagine yourself in an actual conference room and let that direct your behaviour.

It is advisable to mention your name before you put forth a comment, especially in large VC meetings, else people may not identify the author of the idea. Finally, bear in mind that an ideal e-meet lasts 30 minutes – keep it on track so everyone is engaged.

Closing Act

Acknowledge the concerned by mentioning names. Highlight key issues and next steps as agreed, and at the same time place deadlines and responsibilities. In case a follow on meeting is required, set it up then itself. Do send minutes asap.

And here are the 5 cardinal VC sins to be avoided at all cost

1. No recording to be done without mutual consent
2. Never be late. On the contrary, being 2 minutes early is the expected norm. If an emergency has befallen, inform leader or team member at least 10 minutes earlier. Then avoid making remarks when you enter the VC. Just mention in the chat box you have joined.
3. Keep the camera on as courtesy. It's disconcerting to speak into empty boxes with names. It is regarded

amongst the rudest VC behaviour and there is a dreadful term coined for such people – 'lurker'. A tag you surely don't want.

4. Avoid snacking for a person munching in midst of a meeting is a terrible sight and sound. Ugh! Water, Coffee or tea is fine, but drop the happy slurps. We well know how an Indian actor was lambasted on media and social media for eating during a debate hosted on national television and apologised later.
5. Set the camera at an eye level. Avoid looking down into the camera. Nobody is keen to see the contours of your forehead or your fancy ceiling fan nor admire the well kempt nose follicles. Equally, don't appear weak by positioning the camera above your eyes. Either way you look ridiculous and become brunt of future jokes.

The best guiding principle is imagine yourself in an actual conference room and let that direct your behaviour. Remember, a meeting is still a meeting. An opportunity to prove your mettle. Only that now you are on camera where even the subtle gets highlighted. Come out as the hero, not the comedian!



**No recording
without consent**



Be on time



**Keep the camera
on as courtesy**



Avoid snacking



**Set the camera
at an eye level**