

Digest Twelve – November 2025

Theme: Best Practices for Virtual Meetings

Cohort Discussion:

For many of us, public speaking is one of the necessary functions of our work that can produce a significant amount of stress and anxiety. Presenting and communicating in a virtual setting can be particularly challenging as it is usually more difficult to pick up on non-verbal cues, gauge reactions, be spontaneous in your responses to others (and vice versa), and to keep increasingly distracted audiences engaged in what you have to say.

As a cohort, we encourage you to talk about your past experiences and current feelings about public speaking, particularly on video conferencing platforms.

- Are planning and executing presentations more challenging for you in the virtual space?
- Do you find it challenging to remain engaged or engage others when meeting virtually?
- Are you resistant to turning on your camera when meeting online? Why or why not?

Cohort Activity:

Below are a few public speaking “best practices” in a virtual environment. We encourage you to review and discuss them (and perhaps others) in your mentoring cohort meeting.

- Are you employing these strategies in your online meetings?
- Which, if any, do you find challenging or would like to work to improve upon?
- If comfortable, solicit constructive feedback or seek advice from cohort members about your online presence.

Five Best Practices for Virtual Meetings

1. Maintain virtual eye contact:

- Maintaining eye contact means looking into the camera, so position your camera at eye level.
- It’s key to remember that although you don’t always see your audience when presenting, they have a face-to-face view of you. So, look into the camera at your audience and not too intently on the content of your presentation.
- It is generally acknowledged that maintaining eye contact in virtual conversations, as is the case with in-person meetings, helps to build relationships, conveys confidence, and shows engagement and interest.

2. Use hand gestures to your advantage:

- People who use hand gestures when speaking or presenting tend to be better received.
 - You appear more confident and energetic, warm and inviting.

- o They help you pull your audience into conversation.
 - o You look more natural and therefore more relatable.
- Take up the space you have.
 - o In the virtual space, gesture closer to your face so your audience can see your hands.
- Don't overdo it.
 - o Gesturing too much can distract your audience, so be mindful.
 - o Intermittently place your hands in a resting place like your desk or joined in front of you.

3. **Be mindful of your surroundings:**

- Ensure that your background is not distracting to others; eliminate clutter, use the blur feature or a virtual background, etc.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit space.
- Take steps to eliminate background noise. Make sure you're able to speak without distracting others or being distracted.

4. Work on being an effective listener:

- Pay attention to others' tone of voice as that can tell you something about their level of comfort or discomfort, confidence, or empathy. Adjust your response accordingly.
- Respond with more than non-verbal cues by occasionally affirming what others are saying verbally.
- Minimize your image on screen and maximize that of others as it helps you to pay closer attention to what is being said.
- Ask open-ended, reflective, or empathetic questions that will allow others to elaborate, share more information, or provide insight.
- Get comfortable with silence. Allowing for moments of silence allows people to reset and/or reflect so that they can absorb what is said and make decisions.
- Resist the urge to multi-task. Others on the call know when you're not giving them your full attention. This can diminish their level of trust and make relationship building more difficult.

5. **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare:**

- Make sure that you are completely comfortable with your technology before you are expected to present.
 - o Test your connections and camera.
 - o Make sure you know exactly how to share your screen, let participants into the meeting, adjust your view, etc.

- o Log in at least 15 minutes before the meeting to make sure everything is working as you expect.
- Rehearse your presentation more than once.
 - o Deliver your presentation out loud making note of your tone, volume, gestures, facial expressions, and verbal ticks (like repeatedly saying “right”, or “um”), etc.
 - o Record yourself so you can see what your audience will.
 - o Less is more. Give yourself cues to stay on topic.

We hope these public speaking tips prove to be helpful and spark a lively conversation in your cohort groups.