

Engaging Team Members in Virtual Meetings

Virtual teams are now the norm in the workplace. Project Managers grapple with the ever increasing difficulty of engaging team members when they can not see each other and have many pressing priorities. Here are some tips for encouraging engagement in virtual meetings:

1. Make multi-tasking hard to do

- a. build ground rules that allow participants to move from active to passive depending on the agenda
- b. get input from the team members on the ground rules
- c. clarify the importance of meeting attendees' participation
- d. make promises to keep things focused and on track

2. Make sure attendees know why they are there and what contribution is sought from them

- a. spell out ahead of time what you need from each invited individual
- b. don't invite 'just in case' people
- c. determine if this is an information sharing, decision making or status update meeting

3. Don't let the conversation wander too much

- a. publish an agenda ahead of time
- b. publish meeting agenda and context information online ahead of time
- c. refer back to above materials to show a sense of progress
- d. employ strong facilitation skills (either you or someone else) to stay on topic
- e. if you miscalculated on the time needed give people a choice of what to do

4. Provide opportunities for interaction

- a. rule of thumb is to allow interaction every 5-7 minutes
- b. maximize use of virtual meeting technology(ex. Webex) by enabling voting, typing in comments for discussion, go around the table for quick responses to relevant questions
- c. use a back channel to get feedback on how the meeting is going

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5. Get people to talk

- a. there are many reasons why attendees do not want to speak up during a virtual meeting
– personality, culture, demographics, sensitivity of the topic
- b. call on introverts to make sure they are not forgotten
- c. phrase questions that elicit feedback without criticizing
- d. allow opportunities for anonymous participation
- e. either before or after the meeting, reach out one on one to get reticent attendees' perspectives

6. You need to project some energy

- a. this is a difficult one, especially if you aren't feeling particularly peppy!
- b. stay focused on what is being said or not said
- c. vary your tone and volume of voice
- d. change the way you ask questions
- e. take a quick temperature check of the group
- f. ask attendees to stand up and stretch or be prepared to shuffle the agenda if necessary

7. Practice with the technology

- a. do a private practice to try out the tools
- b. invite people 10 minutes early for pre-meeting chitchat or to make sure they can sign on
- c. avoid using every bell and whistle unless you have a production assistant