



Tips and tricks for standing out, winning trust, and gaining credibility in virtual and hybrid meetings

Following on from the Body Language for Leadership masterclass held on 11 May 2022, Mark Bowden has prepared 12 tips to help you as a leader.

1. Build bite-sized content

Meeting participants have a world of distractions right at their fingertips, so keeping their focus can be difficult for even the most seasoned presenter.

2. Encourage active participation

It's one thing to get people to attend your meeting – getting them to stay engaged and present is a whole different challenge. Create a welcoming environment and enrich your content with stimulating visuals and persistent engagement opportunities. Doing so will shake people out of passivity and inspire them to be active meeting participants.

3. Keep it conversational

“A new voice, a new attitude, a new face and background – if only for a few moments – helps make something new and different happen.”

4. Create connection through eye contact

Eye contact is essential for any connection, whether it's made physically or virtually. During the Q&A session, an audience member asked an important question about how eye contact is maintained if you're taking or reading off notes? His advice: open up two separate screens on your desktop, placing them side by side so your eyes remain in one general direction.

5. Let your background speak to who you are

Many will continue to work from home in some capacity post-pandemic – treat it as an opportunity to build bonds over similar interests, even if in a virtual sense. The principle is to let them see more: signals, icons, elements that help them understand what you value and think are important.

6. Establish clear, reliable audio

You don't need professional lighting or cameras to make a meeting engaging, but you do need quality audio. With choppy sound, a meeting immediately becomes uninteresting to the audience. People will check out immediately if the sound is bad. A laptop mic isn't always adequate and reliable, so test how comfortably you can be heard, and if your sound is lacking, equip yourself with an external mic and earpiece, as well as a stable internet connection to protect the sound quality. In addition, it's a great idea to test your microphone before you hop on a call. To support your audio, you should also consider adding in relevant hand gestures such as baton gestures – the gestures that conduct the sense of what is being said along to the rhythm of speech.

7. Be comfortable with silence

It can be hard to know when to talk in a hybrid meeting, as we miss many subtle cues that exist in face-to-face interactions. That means we need to be comfortable with silence. By embracing silence, you create a safe space for others to provide comments or questions, fostering a more engaging dialogue overall.

8. Use your resources wisely

With hybrid work, it's important to “manage risk versus resources”. Bowden said that one of our biggest resources is body language, which may be instinctively biased toward someone. If you're in-person, remain mindful of over-indexing your resources on in-office participants so you don't risk isolating those

that are remote. Simply set up an environment that respects and involves the virtual environment more – start by putting in signs and physical reminders to look at the camera more.

9. Adjust mannerisms and tone

Tailor your mannerisms and tone to ensure there's no participant is left behind. You can animate your actions to better engage remote participants, while also calming your tone for when you speak in person. A simple way to make either party feel more involved? Say their name, as Bowden states, “Use a name if you can, because it credits that person and literally engages their brain.”

10. Keep checking in

You can help regulate meetings by keeping an eye out for gestures that suggest sentiment, as these help participants express their needs and give them space to jump in. You can also use technology to your advantage to keep checking in with your attendees. Bowden's tip: simply ask people to put thoughts and questions into the chat.

11. Expand the visual

The right visual is a key ingredient to making a hybrid meeting successful. When a meeting has visuals via quality video, “it will go much quicker and we're all going to understand each other so much better,” Bowden said. While you can't force anyone to turn their camera on, you can remind them that the environment is more engaging and inclusive with the extra visual. Another Bowden tip: “Wheel in the biggest screen you possibly can.”

12. Be an advocate

In-person meeting participants have a new role in a hybrid environment: advocate. With more barriers in front of remote participants, in-person participants will need to serve as their advocates in the room. “Look after those people on purpose,” Bowden notes. Whether

you establish a designated moderator or set a precedent for all attendees, be intentional about involving remote attendees and advocate

on their behalf during the call so they feel empowered to speak up.

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