

Managing Remote Workers: Effective Virtual Meetings and Conference Calls



For many managers, conference and video calls were familiar but not routine. Today, they're the norm. Just like an in-person meeting, virtual gatherings should be efficient and productive. Here's how you can get the most out of meetings with remote workers.

- Become familiar with the app or technology you'll be using before the call, and have a backup plan if technology fails during the meeting.
- Plan ahead. Create an agenda and send it out ahead of time whenever possible. However, even a few topics scribbled on a sticky note can help keep a meeting on track.
- Before the meeting, send out any materials people should read ahead of time. You'll lose momentum and productivity if meeting participants have to read and listen at the same time.
- Invite only those people who need to be in the meeting. On the other hand, make sure not to leave out anyone essential, which is easier to do with remote workers you don't see all the time.
- If you plan to share your screen, have that window cued up. Minimize any other windows, especially those displaying confidential or sensitive material, in the event you accidentally share the wrong screen.

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- Make sure the lighting in your room is bright enough, your background isn't distracting and your cell phone is on silent.
- Always have a meeting facilitator. This person keeps the meeting on track and encourages participation from everyone, not just the outspoken employees. Try letting team members run meetings from time to time to increase their engagement.
- Start the meeting with a few minutes of social chatting so remote workers can feel more connected to each other.
- Ask participants to mute their audio if they won't be talking for a while to limit distractions from background noises.
- When asking questions of the group, start by directing them to specific people to prevent participants from speaking over each other or to avoid a long silence while everyone waits for the first person to speak. You may need to remind participants to unmute their audio.
- At the end of the meeting, briefly summarize what was covered, as well as any action items that need to be performed and by which person.
- Thank everyone for participating and give the date and time of the next virtual meeting, if applicable.

Virtual meetings are not the same as meeting in person, but they're an essential tool when so many employees are working remotely. Even when business returns to "normal," virtual meetings are not likely to go away, so make sure yours are efficient and productive.

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