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Facilitating Positive Change

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Leadership Tips November, 2020: Align Your Online Communication For Success

Message from Dr. Marilyn Manning



Dear Friends,

In the past few months, communication has taken on a whole new meaning. How can we deeply connect with people virtually? Can we cultivate meaningful relationships when we rarely see the person face-to-face?

From our personal experience these past seven months of doing numerous Zoom trainings for our clients, Zoom and FaceTime executive coaching, and facilitating team retreats, we have learned a great deal about both exploiting the advantages and overcoming the challenges. People have a need to feel valued and connected. We hope our TIPS will be helpful in meeting those needs.

Warm regards,

Marilyn
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P.S. Don't forget to reserve your seat for our next two complimentary 30-min Zoom events, next week and next month (see below). [And we invite you to revisit our brand new 2020 Website at the same URL.](#)



In this issue of *Leadership Tips*...

1. Article: Align Your Online Communication for Success
 2. Tuesday, November 10: Zoom event: Virtual Facilitation and Meeting Tips, 1:00-1:30PM Pacific. (No Charge)
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 4. Our new on-line trainings
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Align Your Online Communication for Success

It was my fourth Zoom meeting of the new week, and it was only late afternoon on Monday. Ughhhh. I could see the fatigue on the faces of my colleagues in their little windows and wondered if high definition was revealing mine. This meeting I was a participant and found the leader monotonal, disinterested, and long-winded, a terrible trifecta. Luckily some of the other participants infused the meeting with energy, passion, and vocal variety in their reports and discussions. This helped mitigate a poorly constructed agenda, much repetition, and an early loss of control of the meeting by our leader.

Alas, two-thirds of the way through our meeting an area-wide power outage caused by local wildfires caused a swift adjournment. My disappointment took me from Zoom to Zzzzs. I was zonked, skipped dinner, and crashed for the night.

Sound familiar? Online meetings have challenges, but they can also have some major

advantages such as using break-out rooms, polling, chat, and the ease of moving from one speaker to another. Indeed, there are fewer interruptions, and for most meetings of two dozen or fewer, you can see everyone all in one place.

Transitioning from Live to Online

As a meeting leader and participant, you've long-ago mastered the basics of leading, facilitating, and attending in-person meetings. But now, most of our communication and meetings are conducted online. They include:

- Staff meetings
- Team and project meetings
- One-on-one meetings
- Performance review meetings
- Town hall meetings
- Social hours
- Trainings

Simply moving communication and meetings online without making appropriate adjustments yields diminished results. This month we share some best practices for conducting effective online meetings.

1. **Shorten your meeting times.** Zoom fatigue is real. We're all spending so much more time in online meetings, regardless of the meeting platform being used. Diminishing returns derive from longer and more frequent meetings, which tax our body, brains, eyes, and attention spans.

TIP: See if you can shorten your meeting times by 20-35%. Crisp meetings leave everybody energized. For short meetings, ask that everyone participate from a standing position. But remember to adjust your camera accordingly.

2. **Share the load.** Delegate aspects of each meeting to your direct reports or team members to lead or facilitate. Listening to any one voice, even yours, loses its impact over time. Variety stimulates our brains. Different voices, delivery styles, and even backdrops all keep us fresh as listeners and viewers. And, participants taking on leadership roles are themselves more vested. Soon everyone is more engaged.

TIP: Alert attendees in advance that you would like them to lead appropriate segments of your upcoming meeting. Everyone is livened up when they help shape the agenda and lead or facilitate portions of each meeting.

3. **Vary content.** To keep people's attention and stimulate different parts of their brains, seek to employ variety such as:

- Still images that are evocative
- Infographics
- Short videos (see below)
- Short stories related to meeting topics
- Adding a fun quiz, puzzle, or trivia game of relevant content
- Surprise! (Something unexpected that delights like food delivery)
- A contest — to solve a work problem or challenge

For a staff meeting whose theme was

teambuilding a manager began by showing [a short YouTube video](#) on one method of building trust in relationships that went awry. The laughs were therapeutic, yet the ensuing conversation was fruitful as focus shifted to what works.



4. **Schedule unstructured or informal time** within a structured meeting: A tightly controlled and packed meeting creates tension and pressure to “get it all in” or finish on time, and consciously and subconsciously, curtails exploration of ideas and themes, “what if...?” activities and creative thinking.

Allow time for group discussion during the meeting, in addition to the light banter before a meeting begins or after it ends. Signal the shift and set the appropriate tone for this interlude.

TIPS:

- *One city council signaled the onset of their open period of the meeting dedicated to brainstorming by blowing kazoos, streamers, and colored plastic slide whistles to loosen inhibitions and think non-linearly.*
- *A county department head transitioned to the special visioning portion of their department’s weekly online meeting by sharing the screen of a kaleidoscope.*
- *To induce serious contemplation within a rigid meeting format, consider playing music in the background, whether classical, sounds of nature, or moody jazz.*
- *To accelerate heart rates and induce some rapid-fire ideation, one manager played game popular show themes for attendees to set a powerful tone.*

5. **Breaks:** For longer meetings allow for short breaks. Even if it’s a stand-and-stretch-in-place break, it brings oxygen to our brains, brings activity to our bodies, and allows us to re-seat ourselves for the next meeting segment.

The Gift Exchange: *Here’s a seasonal activity that can be used between meeting segments or for a break. It’s a fun and energizing change of pace, involves creativity, connection and collaboration, and allows everyone to receive something meaningful to them.*

In your online meeting, declare “I am giving a gift to Kathye” and demonstrably hand her an invisible gift. Kathye, in her window, accepts the offer, then opens the invisible gift and declares in one sentence what it is and why she appreciates it: “Wow, it’s a self watering plant...perfect for me at this time!”

Now Kathye selects another meeting participant aloud, Stewart, and hands him his invisible gift from her window. Stewart opens his gift and declares delight at a gift from Kathye that he appreciates: “It’s perfect...a quill pen to encourage me to continue writing poetry by hand.” (By the way, gifts don’t have to be tangible. They can be fun, symbolic, or even esoteric.)

Stewart gifts Susan and she declares her unexpected gift and why it hits the mark. Then she bestows an invisible gift upon Marilyn, who gushes about it and then gifts

Victoria with something we learn she desired, and finally the initiator, yours truly, receives a gift from Victoria, a book about courageous conversations. "Thank you Victoria, it's just what I needed!" (If you're tracking our team, don't worry. Richard took a mental health day—in its own way a gift for the spirit—and was absent from this meeting.)

And then the meeting content resumes with everyone refreshed and feeling better about themselves and each other too.

6. Ice-Breakers: These short group activities can be used at the beginning of a meeting to warm people up, bring them together, ease them into the meeting, and also foreshadow what is to come.

Ice-breakers also allow those coming from other meetings to arrive slightly late without missing key content. Ice-breakers include short activities, collaboration, or competitions. They can also be deployed between meeting segments, as a change-of-pace, or a segue, or a light interlude amidst heavy topics. They give participants a “feel good” experience with co-workers and also help build momentum as the meeting begins or carries on.

TIP:

At a recent opening of a meeting where a group was feeling Coronavirus fatigue, each attendee was invited to share, in one sentence, a “silver lining” of being displaced from the office and working from home for 7 months. Among the observations:

- *“My commute went from 15 miles to 15 feet.”*
- *“My dog's ecstatic that I am always available for petting, feeding and walking.”*
- *“My car used to get 22 miles per gallon...now I get 3 months per gallon!”*

Everyone found something to be grateful for and the meeting that followed flowed.

Embrace the silver linings of online meetings and celebrate the culture you're creating online during this difficult stretch for us all. These tips will help you to improve your online meetings and see that communication come alive. Everyone will thank you. Meeting adjourned!

Note: These tips come from our popular online trainings, [Meetings Made Easy](#), and [Leading and Facilitating Effective Online and Live Meetings](#)

Ice-Breakers

Email Marilyn for complimentary online Ice-Breakers to customize for your meetings

Click to request
PDF

Click here to register for this free
webinar

FREE 30-min. online event Tuesday November 10, 1PM: Virtual Facilitation and Meeting Tips



Facilitated by Senior Associate Susan G. Schwartz, PMP

Learn tips on how to make any meeting more productive and engaging

This short program will address how to:

- Review meeting essentials: agenda, agreements, purpose
- Prepare participants with pre-work
- Get comfortable with meeting software features like breakout rooms, chat, polling, whiteboards
- Receive tips for handling disruptive behavior

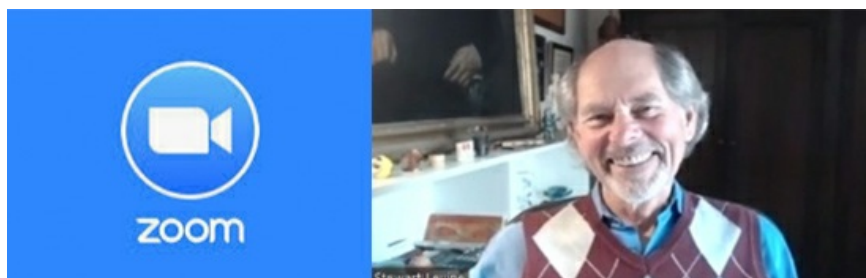
**Tuesday, November 10
1:00-1:30PM Pacific**

Limited space: confirm your seat and receive log-in details
when you register using the button below.

Register for this free 30-min. online event next
week

Click here to register for this free December
webinar

FREE 30-min. online event Tuesday December 8, 1PM: Create A Culture of Belonging



Facilitated by Senior Associate Stewart Levine, J.D.

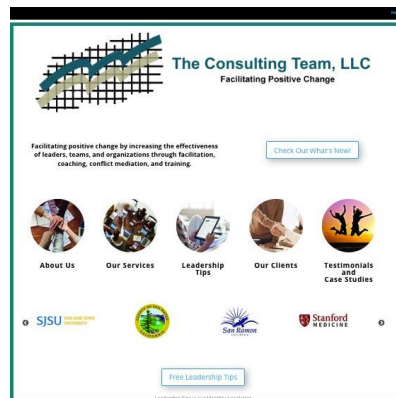
Learn how to build a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- Current observations of your organization's culture
- What might you, as an individual, do differently?
- What might your organization do differently?

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Limited space: confirm your seat and receive log-in details when you register using the button below.

Register for this free 30-min. online event



Our new On-line Trainings for Today's Virtual World:

Customized for you...from 90 Minutes - 3 Hours

All offerings on www.TheConsultingTeam.com are now virtual

Best Practices for Managing Remote Workers and Teams

Would you like help communicating one-on-one with direct reports working from home? This program offers tips for conducting crucial conversations remotely, helping coach your staff in prioritizing timeliness and self-management, and strategies for increasing online engagement and motivation.

Managing Crisis and Change: Surviving in a State of Flux

This session provides the tools you need for transitioning through change and self-care to embrace the new reality. Learn how to proactively navigate and smoothly embrace uncertainty by using the stages of processing change to know where you are and what's next.

How to Stay Fresh and Relieve Stress

More than ever, employees, supervisors and managers are experiencing disruptions,

frustrations, and stress from illness, technical challenges, economic pressures and the uncertainties of this current pandemic. Learn techniques for self-care, stress reduction, creating a nurturing and soothing environment, and how to look out for each other to remain healthy, productive and upbeat, while future-focusing.

[Applying Emotional Intelligence in Uncertain Times](#)

During times of uncertainty people look to their managers to provide clarity that will enable them to deal with chaos, overcome challenges, and achieve shared goals. Emotional Intelligence equips managers to recognize their own and others' behaviors and make choices to improve workplace performance and productivity. This session provides you with easy-to-implement tools you can apply immediately.

[Listening Amid Endless Distractions](#)

During shelter-at-home we're more distracted than ever. This training helps you pay attention to paying attention. Learn to avoid common listening mistakes, deepen your ability to "go deep" as a listener, discerning what is being said, implied, unspoken and more. You will learn to understand the "listening gap" and how to overcome it, and how better listening leads to increased trust, enhanced credibility and better team cohesion.

[Managing Multiple Demands and Priorities While Working From Home](#)

Learn proven techniques for prioritizing your projects, time and energy while working remotely. Receive help managing distractions, remaining focused, dealing with internal and external pressures while getting back into your flow state while having your out-of-office experience. Discover ways to optimize your environment to increase productivity and peace of mind.

For information contact [Dr. Marilyn Manning](#)

You can also reach us by phone: (650) 965-3663

Get A Boost From Our Team of Trainers, Facilitators, and Coaches



[Stewart Levine, J.D.](#)



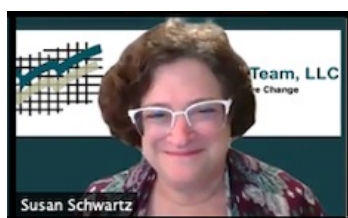
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Contact The Consulting Team to learn more about our online training, group and one-to-one virtual coaching, and consulting assistance for leaders and employees.

The Consulting Team

— FACILITATING POSITIVE CHANGE —

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